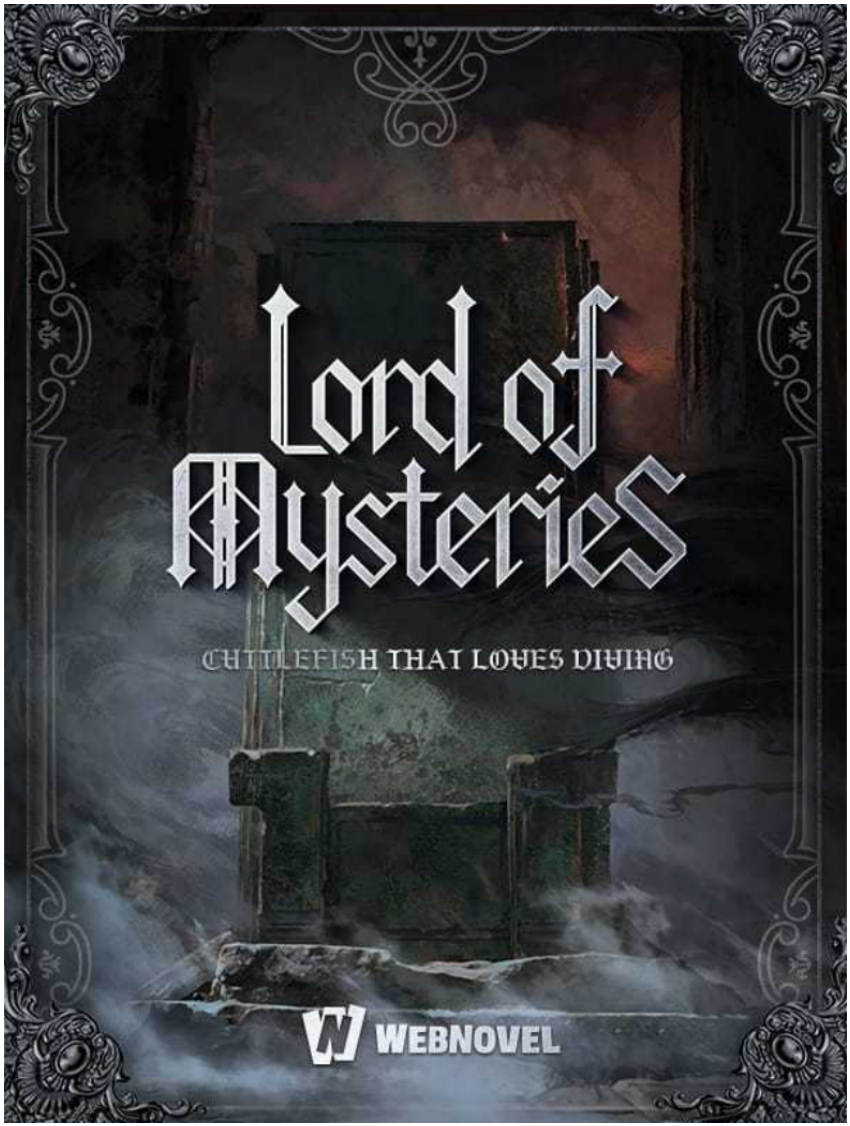
Lord of Mysteries
CUTTLEFISH THAT LOVES DIVING
WEBNOVEL

Information

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Lord of Mysteries

Fantasia

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Sinopse

With the rising tide of steam power and machinery, who can come close to being a Beyonder? Shrouded in the fog of history and darkness, who or what is the lurking evil that murmurs into our ears?

Waking up to be faced with a string of mysteries, Zhou Mingrui finds himself reincarnated as Klein Moretti in an alternate Victorian era world where he sees a world filled with machinery, cannons, dreadnoughts, airships, difference machines, as well as Potions, Divination, Hexes, Tarot Cards, Sealed Artifacts…

The Light continues to shine but mystery has never gone far. Follow Klein as he finds himself entangled with the Churches of the world—both orthodox and unorthodox—while he slowly develops newfound powers thanks to the Beyonder potions.

Like the corresponding tarot card, The Fool, which is numbered 0—a number of unlimited potential—this is the legend of "The Fool."

1: Crimson

Ouch!

It hurts so much!

My head is killing me!

The bizarre dream filled with murmurs shattered instantly. Zhou Mingrui, still asleep, felt a throbbing pain in his head as if someone had hit him with a pole—again and again. No, it was more like a sharp object had pierced his temple, twisting it in the process!

Ouch… In his stupor, Zhou Mingrui tried to turn over, hold his head, and sit up, but he couldn't move his limbs. They refused to budge, leaving him completely immobilized and helpless.

It looks like I'm still not awake, still dreaming… Maybe in a short while I'll think I'm awake, but I'm still sleeping… Zhou Mingrui, used to such disorienting experiences, struggled to focus and break free from the shackles of darkness and confusion.

However, while half-awake, he tried to focus his will that felt as insubstantial as a wisp of fog—there one moment and gone the next. His thoughts refused to be controlled or examined. No matter how hard he tried, his focus kept slipping away as random notions and images bubbled up unbidden.

Why would I suddenly get such a terrible headache in the middle of the night?

And it's so painful!

Could it be a cerebral hemorrhage or something?

*F**k, am I going to die young like this?*

I need to wake up! Now!

Huh? It doesn't hurt as much as before, but it still feels like a blunt knife is slowly slicing through my brain…

Looks like I can't go back to sleep. How am I supposed to work tomorrow?

Why am I even thinking about work? With a headache like this, I should take the day off! No need to worry about the manager's nagging!

Hey, putting it that way, it doesn't seem too bad. Hehe, I can end up getting some spare time for myself!

The throbbing pain allowed Zhou Mingrui to gradually gather immaterial strength. Finally, he straightened his back and opened his eyes, fully breaking free from his reverie.

His vision first blurred, then was tinged with a faint crimson. He saw a wooden desk in front of him with an open notebook in the center. The pages were coarse and yellowed, with an eye-catching sentence written in deep black ink at the top.

To the left of the notebook was a stack of neatly arranged books, numbering about eight. The wall to their right had grayish-white pipes and a wall lamp connected to them.

The lamp had a classic Western style, about half the size of an adult's head, with a transparent glass inner layer and a black metal grid on the outside.

Diagonally beneath the extinguished wall lamp was a black ink bottle bathed in a pale red glow. Its embossed surface formed a blurry angel pattern.

In front of the ink bottle, to the right of the notebook, lay a dark-colored pen with a rounded body. Its tip shimmered faintly, and its cap rested next to a brass revolver.

A gun? A revolver? Zhou Mingrui was stunned. Everything he saw was so unfamiliar and looked nothing like his room!

In his shock and confusion, he noticed that the desk, notebook, ink bottle, and revolver were covered in a layer of crimson "veil" from the light shining through the window.

Subconsciously, he lifted his head and his gaze slowly moved upwards.

In midair, against a backdrop of 'black velvet curtains,' a crimson moon hung high, shining silently.

Wh— Zhou Mingrui felt inexplicably terrified and stood up abruptly. But before he could straighten his legs, his head throbbed with pain again, causing him to lose strength and fall back heavily onto the hard wooden chair.

Thud!

The pain did little. Zhou Mingrui propped himself up with his hands on the table, stood up again, and turned around in a panic, examining his surroundings.

It was a small room with a brown door on each side and a wooden bunk bed against the opposite wall.

Between the bed and the left door was a cabinet with two open doors on top and five drawers below.

Next to the cabinet, at about the height of a person, was another grayish-white pipe connected to a strange mechanical device with some exposed gears and bearings.

In the right corner of the room near the desk were items resembling coal stoves, along with soup pots, iron pots, and other kitchen utensils.

Across from the right door was a dressing mirror with two cracks. Its wooden base had simple and plain patterns.

With a quick glance, Zhou Mingrui caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror—the current him: black hair, brown eyes, a linen shirt, a thin build, average features, but with a rather deep outline…

Wh— Zhou Mingrui gasped, his mind flooded with helpless and confused thoughts.

The revolver, the classical Western decor, and the crimson moon different from Earth's moon all indicated one thing!

C-could I have transmigrated? Zhou Mingrui's mouth slowly opened.

He had grown up reading web novels and often fantasized about such scenarios. But when it really happened, he found it hard to accept.

Almost a minute later, Zhou Mingrui muttered to himself, trying to find some humor in his situation, *This is probably what it means to love a fantasy*[1]?

If it weren't for the persistent headache keeping his thoughts sharp, he would have definitely thought he was dreaming.

Calm down, calm down, calm down… After taking a few deep breaths, Zhou Mingrui tried hard to stop panicking.

At that moment, as his mind and body calmed down, memories began flooding him, slowly appearing in his mind!

Klein Moretti, a citizen of the Northern Continent's Loen Kingdom, Awwa County, City of Tingen. He is also a recent graduate from the Department of History at Khoy University…

His father was a sergeant in the Imperial Army who died in a colonial conflict on the Southern Continent. The compensation money allowed Klein to attend a private grammar school, laying the foundation for his university admission…

His mother was a devotee of the Evernight Goddess. She passed away the year Klein passed the entrance examinations to Khoy University…

He also has an elder brother and a younger sister. They live together in a two bedroom apartment…

Their family is not wealthy, even struggling. They are currently supported by his elder brother who works as a clerk at an import and export company…

As a history graduate, Klein had learned the ancient Feysac language—considered the source of all languages in the Northern Continent—and the Hermes language often found in ancient mausoleums related to rituals and prayers…

Hermes language? Zhou Mingrui's mind stirred. He reached out to rub his throbbing temples and looked at the open notebook on the desk. The text on the yellowed paper went from strange to alien, then from alien to familiar, until it became readable.

It was text written in Hermes language!

The dark ink said: "Everyone will die, including me."

Hiss! Zhou Mingrui felt inexplicably horrified. He instinctively leaned back, trying to distance himself from the notebook and the text on it.

He was so weak he nearly fell, but managed to grab the edge of the table in a panic. The surrounding air felt turbulent, with faint whispers echoing around him. It reminded him of hearing horror stories from his elders when he was young.

He shook his head, telling himself it was just an illusion. Zhou Mingrui steadied himself, shifted his gaze from the notebook, and took deep breaths.

This time, his gaze landed on the shimmering brass revolver. A sudden question popped into his mind.

With Klein's family situation, how could they afford or even get a revolver? Zhou Mingrui couldn't help but frown.

While deep in thought, he suddenly noticed a red handprint on the edge of the table. Its color was deeper than the moonlight and thicker than the 'veil.'

It was a bloody handprint!

A bloody handprint? Zhou Mingrui subconsciously turned over his right hand that had been holding the edge of the table. Looking down, he saw his palm and fingers were covered in blood.

At the same time, the throbbing pain in his head continued. Although it had weakened a little, it was still persistent.

Did I smash my head? Zhou Mingrui wondered as he turned around and walked towards the cracked dressing mirror.

A few steps later, a medium-built figure with black hair and brown eyes came into view. The person had a distinctly scholarly air.

Is this me now? Klein Moretti?

Zhou Mingrui paused for a moment. Due to the dim light, he couldn't see clearly, so he moved forward until he was just a step away from the mirror.

Using the crimson moonlight, he turned his head to check the side of his forehead.

The clear reflection in the mirror showed a grotesque wound on his temple, with burn marks around it. The area was stained with blood, and grayish-white brain matter slowly wriggled within.

1. This is actually a proverb that describes Lord Ye. In ancient times, Lord Ye was very fond of dragons, adorning his whole palace—beams, pillars, doors, windows and walls—with drawings and carvings of them. When a real dragon in heaven heard of this, it was deeply moved by his infatuation and paid him a visit. When Lord Ye saw the real dragon thrusting its head in through the window of his study and its tail moving in his palace, he was frightened out of the house for his life. Clearly, what Lord Ye loved was not a real dragon.

2: Situation

Tap! Tap! Tap!

Zhou Mingrui reeled back in fear at the sight that greeted him. It was as though the person in the dressing mirror was not himself, but a dessicated corpse.

How could a person with such grievous wounds be still alive!?

He turned his head in disbelief again and checked the other side. Even though he was a distance away and the lighting was poor, he could still see the penetrating wound and dark red blood stains.

"This…"

Zhou Mingrui drew a deep breath as he tried hard to calm himself.

He reached out to press his left chest and sensed his racing heart that exuded immense vitality.

He then touched his exposed skin. Beneath the slight coldness was flowing warmth.

When he squatted down and after verifying that his knees could bend, Zhou Mingrui stood up again and calmed down.

"What's happening?" he muttered with a frown. He planned to inspect his head injury seriously once more.

He took two steps forward and suddenly paused. The moonlight of the sanguine moon was relatively dark, so it was insufficient for his 'serious inspection.'

A memory fragment triggered as Zhou Mingrui turned his head to look at the grayish-white pipes and the metallic-gridded lamp on the wall right beside the study desk.

This was the most common gas lamp of the times. Its flame was stable and its illumination capabilities were excellent.

With Klein Moretti's family situation, even a kerosene lamp was a dream, much less a gas lamp. Using candles was most apt for their standing and stature. However, back when he burned the midnight oil four years ago to be admitted into Khoy University, his elder brother, Benson, felt that it was an important matter which their family's future depended upon. Therefore, he insisted on creating conducive studying conditions for Klein even if it meant taking on debt.

Of course, Benson, who was literate and had worked for several years, was not a rash person who did not think of the consequences. He had quite some tricks up his sleeve. He reasoned with the landlord to 'raise the apartment's standards by installing gas pipes to improve the likelihood of rentals in the future.' The landlord was convinced and provided the money to complete the basic modifications. Then, using the convenience of working at an import and export company, he purchased a brand new gas lamp which was nearly at cost price. In the end, all he needed was to use his savings and did not need to borrow money.

After the memory fragment flashed past his mind, Zhou Mingrui came to the desk where he turned the pipe's valve and began twisting the gas lamp's switch.

With a sputtering sound, a spark sounded from friction. Light did not descend upon Zhou Mingrui as he had expected.

He twisted the switch a few more times, but all the gas lamp did was sputter and remain dark.

"Hmm…" Retracting his hand and pressing on his left temple, Zhou Mingrui sought for the reason by rummaging through his memory fragments.

A few seconds later, he turned around and walked toward the door. He arrived at the machine installation which was similarly inset into the wall and had grayish-white pipes connected to it.

This was a gas meter!

After seeing the exposed gears and bearings, Zhou Mingrui took out a coin from his trousers' pocket.

It was dark yellow in color and had a bronze shimmer to it. The front of the coin was engraved with a portrait of a crown-wearing man, and there was a '1' on a clump of wheat on the back.

Zhou Mingrui knew that this was the most basic currency of the Loen Kingdom. It was called a copper penny. One penny's purchasing power was roughly three to four yuan before his transmigration. Such coins had other denominations such as the five pence, a halfpence and a quarter-pence. Despite the three types, the denominations were not in small-enough units. In everyday life, one had to buy several different things just to spend a single coin from time to time.

After flipping the coin—which was only minted and circulated after King George III ascended to the throne—a few times, Zhou Mingrui inserted it into the gas meter's thin vertical 'mouth.'

Clink! Clang!

After the penny fell to the bottom of the meter, the sound of grinding gears sounded immediately, producing a short but melodious mechanical rhythm.

Zhou Mingrui stared at the meter for a few seconds before returning to the burly wood desk. He then reached out to twist the gas lamp's switch.

After some sputtering, there was a sharp sound!

A fire plume ignited and rapidly grew. Bright light first occupied the internals of the wall lamp before penetrating the transparent glass, blanketing the room with a warm glow.

The darkness quickly receded as the crimson retreated out the

window. Zhou Mingrui felt at ease for a baffling reason as he quickly came in front of the dressing mirror.

This time, he seriously inspected his temple and did not miss a single detail.

After a few rounds of inspection, he realized that apart from the original blood stain, liquid was no longer flowing out of the grotesque wound. It appeared like it had received the best hemostasis and bandaging. As for the slowly squirming grayish-white brain and the discernible growth of flesh and blood around the wound, it meant that the wound might take thirty to forty minutes, or maybe even two to three hours before it would only leave a light scar.

The restorative effects that transmigration brings? Zhou Mingrui curled up the right corner of his mouth as he muttered silently.

Following that, he let out a long sigh. Regardless, he was still alive!

After settling his mind, he pulled open a drawer and took out a tiny piece of soap. He took one of the old and tattered towels hanging by the side of the cupboard and opened the door. He then walked to the public bathroom which was shared by the tenants on the second floor.

Yes, I should clean up the blood stains on my head, or I'll keep looking like a crime scene. It's fine scaring myself, but if I were to scare my sister, Melissa, when she gets up early in the morning tomorrow, it would be quite problematic!

The corridor outside was pitch black. Silhouettes were barely accentuated by the crimson moonlight from the window at the end of the corridor. They looked like a pair of monster eyes that silently observed the living late into the night.

Zhou Mingrui lightened his footsteps as he walked towards the communal bathroom with a shuddering fear.

When he entered, there was even more moonlight, allowing him to see everything clearly. Zhou Mingrui stood in front of a wash basin and turned the tap's knob.

Upon hearing the gushing sound of water, he suddenly recalled his landlord, Mr. Franky.

As water was included in the rent, this short and thin gentleman who wore a top hat, a vest, and a black suit, always inspected the bathroom actively to take note of any sounds of flowing water.

If the water gushed too loudly, Mr. Franky would ignore all of his gentlemanly traits by flailing his walking stick and striking the bathroom's door, shouting things like 'Darn thief,' 'Wastage is a shameless matter,' 'I'll remember you,' 'If I see this happen another time, scram along with your filthy luggage,' 'Mark my words, this is the most value-for-money apartment in Tingen City. You will not find a more kindly landlord anywhere else!'

Putting away those thoughts, Zhou Mingrui used a moist towel to clean the blood stains from his face again and again.

After checking himself using the rundown mirror in the bathroom and verifying that all that was left was a hideous wound and a pale face, Zhou Mingrui relaxed. Then, he took off his linen shirt and used a bar of soap to wash away the bloodstains.

At that moment, he knitted his brows and recalled a possible problem.

The wound was too exaggerated and there was too much blood. Apart from his body, his room likely still had signs of his injury!

After Zhou Mingrui was done with his linen shirt a few minutes later, he briskly returned to his apartment with a moist towel. He first wiped the blood handprint on the desk and then, using the gas lamp's illumination, sought out spots which he missed out.

He immediately discovered that quite a substantial amount of blood had splattered onto the floor beneath the desk. And there was a yellow bullet to the left side of the wall.

"Releasing a round with a revolver pointed at the temple?" After mixing and matching the clues from before, Zhou Mingrui had a rough idea how Klein had died.

He was in no hurry to verify his guess. Instead, he seriously wiped away the blood stains and cleaned up the 'scene.' Following that, he took the bullet and returned to the side of his desk. He opened the revolver's cylinder and poured out the rounds inside.

A total of five rounds and a cartridge shell all had a brass luster to them.

"Indeed…" Zhou Mingrui looked at the empty cartridge shell in front of him and stuffed the rounds back into the cylinder while nodding.

He shifted his gaze to the left and it landed on the notebook's words: 'Everyone will die, including me.' Following that, even more questions arose in him.

Where did the gun come from?

Was it suicide or a faked suicide?

What kind of trouble could a history graduate of humble origins get himself into?

Why would such a suicide method only leave behind so little blood? Was it because I transmigrated in a timely manner and it came with healing benefits?

After pondering for a moment, Zhou Mingrui changed into another linen shirt. He sat on the chair and began pondering over more important matters.

Klein's experience was still not something he needed to concern himself with. The true problem was to figure out the reason for his transmigration and if he could return!

His parents, relatives, best buddies, and friends. The fascinating world of the Internet and all sorts of delicious delicacies… These were reasons that prompted his desire to return!

Click. Click. Click… Zhou Mingrui's right hand was subconsciously pulling out the revolver's cylinder and slamming it back into place, again and again.

Yea, there has not been much difference for me between this period of time and the past. I was just a little unlucky, but why would I transmigrate for no baffling reason?

Bad luck… Yes, I tried a luck enhancement ritual before dinner today!

A thought flashed in Zhou Mingrui's mind, illuminating the memories which were concealed by a fog of confusion.

As a qualified keyboard politician, keyboard historian, keyboard economist, keyboard biologist, and keyboard folklorist, he had always deemed himself as 'knowing something of everything.' Of course, his best buddy would often mock him as 'only knowing a little of everything.'

And one of them was Chinese Divination.

When he visited his hometown last year, he had discovered a thread-bound book titled 'Quintessential Divination and Arcane Arts of the Qin and Han Dynasty' at an old bookstore. It looked pretty interesting and could aid him in posturing on the Internet, so he bought it. Unfortunately, his interest was short-lived. The vertical script it used made the reading experience horrible. All he did was flip through the beginning pages before he threw it into a corner.

He had experienced a spate of bad luck in the past month—losing his cell phone, customers running away after cheating him, and mistakes at work. Only then did he suddenly recall the luck enhancement ritual written at the beginning of 'Quintessential Divination and Arcane Arts.' Furthermore, the requirements were extremely simple, without any basic foundation requirements.

All he needed was to get four portions of the staple food in his area and place them in the four corners of his room. They could be placed on furniture such as tables and cupboards. Then, standing in the middle of the room, he had to take four steps in a counter-clockwise fashion to make a square. The first step required him to sincerely chant 'The Immortal Lord of Heaven and Earth for Blessings.' The second step was to silently chant, 'The Sky Lord of Heaven and Earth for Blessings.' The third step was 'The Exalted Thearch of Heaven and Earth for Blessings,' and the fourth step was 'The Celestial Worthy of

Heaven and Earth for Blessings.' After the four steps were taken, he needed to close his eyes and wait five minutes in his original spot. Only then would the ritual be considered complete.

Since it did not cost him any money, he found the book, followed what was stipulated, and did it before dinner. However… nothing happened back then.

Who would have guessed that he would actually transmigrate in the middle of the night!

Transmigration!

There is a distinct possibility that it's due to that luck enhancement ritual… Yes, I should give it a try here tomorrow. If it's really because of that, I stand a chance of transmigrating back! Zhou Mingrui stopped flicking the revolver's cylinder and suddenly sat straight up.

Regardless, he had to give it a try!

He had to attempt a Hail Mary!

3: Melissa

After confirming his plan, Zhou Mingrui immediately felt he had a mental crutch. His fear and unease were all swept away into a corner of his mind.

Only then did he have the mood to carefully study Klein's memory fragments.

Zhou Mingrui habitually stood up before turning off the pipe's valve. He watched the wall lamp gradually dim until its flame extinguished before sitting back down. As he subconsciously fiddled with the revolver's brass cylinder, he pressed the side of his head. He slowly recalled his memories in the crimson-dyed darkness as though he was the most attentive viewer in a movie theater.

Perhaps as a result of having a bullet pass through his head, Klein's memories were like shattered glass. Not only were the memories not contiguous, there were many spots which were clearly missing. For example, memories pertaining to how the exquisite revolver appeared in his possession, whether he had committed suicide, or was killed, as well as the meaning of the words 'Everyone will die, including me' on the notebook, or whether he had participated in anything odd two days before the incident.

Not only had these particular memories become fragmented, there were also missing pieces. It was the same even for knowledge he ought to know. In light of the present situation, Zhou Mingrui believed that if Klein were to return to university, it was unlikely he could graduate. This was despite him having left campus just days ago without relaxing one bit.

He needs to participate in the Tingen University's History department

interview two days later…

The university graduates of Loen Kingdom do not have the tradition of staying at their alma mater… His mentor had given him a recommendation letter for Tingen University and Backlund University…

…

Through the window, Zhou Mingrui silently observed the red moon setting in the west. The gradual sinking of the moon continued until faint light glowed from the east, dyeing the horizon golden.

At that moment, there was a commotion inside the apartment. Soon, the sound of footsteps approached his door.

"Melissa is awake… She's really as punctual as always." Zhou Mingrui smiled. Due to Klein's memories, seeing Melissa made him feel as though she was really his younger sister.

However, I do not have a younger sister… He immediately contradicted himself.

Melissa was different from Benson and Klein. Her rudimentary education was not completed at the Sunday school classes offered by the Church of Evernight. When she reached schooling age, the Loen Kingdom had enacted the 'Basic Education Law.' A Primary and Secondary Education Committee was established and was specially provided with funding, increasing the kingdom's investment into education.

In less than three years, under the premise that numerous church schools would be incorporated, many public primary schools were established to strictly maintain the principle of religious neutrality. This was to prevent education from involving itself in the conflicts between the Lord of Storms, Evernight Goddess, and the God of Steam and Machinery.

Compared to Sunday school that only cost a copper penny a week, a public primary school's cost of three pence a week appeared rather expensive. However, the former only provided education every Sunday, whereas the latter provided six days of classes a week. In

conclusion, the price was so low that it was almost free.

Melissa was different from most girls. From a young age, she enjoyed things like gears, springs, and bearings. Her ambition was to be a steam mechanic.

Having suffered from a lack of culture, Benson, who knew the importance of education, supported his sister's dreams just like how he supported Klein's university education. After all, Tingen Technical School was only considered secondary education. There was no need for her to attend grammar school or a public school for more knowledge.

In July last year, fifteen-year-old Melissa passed her entrance examinations and fulfilled her dreams of becoming a student at the Tingen Technical School's Steam and Machinery department. As such, her weekly school fees were raised to nine pence.

Meanwhile, Benson's company was affected by the situation in the Southern Continent. There was a drastic drop both in profit and business transactions. More than a third of the employees were retrenched. In order to keep his job and maintain their livelihood, Benson could only accept more arduous tasks. He had to work overtime more frequently or head to places with harsh environments. That was what he was occupied with the past few days.

It was not that Klein did not think of helping share his elder brother's burden but being born a commoner and having been admitted into an average grammar school, he felt a strong sense of inadequacy when he enrolled into university. For example, as the origin of all languages in the Northern Continent, the ancient language of Feysac was something all the children of nobles and of the wealthy class would learn from a young age. In contrast, he only made first contact with it in university.

He faced many similar aspects during his schooling career. Klein nearly gave his all and often stayed up late into the night and woke up early before barely managing to catch up to the others, eventually allowing him to graduate with average results.

Memories regarding his elder brother and younger sister remained

active in Zhou Mingrui's mind until he turned the doorknob open. Only then did he jolt awake and remember that he held a revolver in his hand.

This was a semi-regulated item!

It will scare children!

Also, there's still the wound on my head!

With Melissa arriving at any moment, Zhou Mingrui pressed onto his temple and hurriedly pulled open a desk drawer and threw the revolver in before slamming it close.

"What happened?" Melissa looked over curiously when she heard the commotion.

She was still in the prime of her youth. Even though she didn't have much nutritious food to eat, making her face thin and slightly pale, her skin remained lustrous as it exuded the vibes of a young girl.

When Zhou Mingrui saw his sister's brown eyes look over, he forcibly composed himself and picked up an item beside his hand before calmly closing the drawer to conceal the existence of the revolver. He placed his other hand on his temple, the texture confirming that his wound had already healed!

He took out a silver vine-leaf pocket watch and pressed the top gently, causing its cover to flip open.

It was a picture of the siblings' father. It was the most valuable item the Imperial Army sergeant left behind, but being a second-hand item, it would often malfunction from time to time in recent years even though he had gotten a watchsmith to fix it. It had embarrassed Benson who enjoyed bringing it with him to elevate his status many a time, so it was thrown away back at home in the end.

It had to be said that perhaps Melissa did have talent in machinery. After grasping the principles behind the watch, she borrowed the tools from her Technical School to fiddle with the pocket watch. Recently, she even claimed to have fixed it!

Zhou Mingrui looked at the watch's open cover and saw that the second hand was not moving. Subconsciously, he twisted the top dial to wind the pocket watch.

However, despite winding it a few times, he did not hear the sound of taut springs. The second hand remained motionless.

"It looks like it's broken again." He looked at his sister while trying to find a topic of conversation.

Melissa shot him an expressionless glance and briskly walked over to take the pocket watch away.

She stood in her spot and pulled up the button sitting atop the pocket watch. With a few simple turns, the tick-tocking of the second hand sounded.

Isn't pulling the button up usually meant to adjust the time… Zhou Mingrui's expression immediately turned blank.

At that moment, a bell chimed from a faraway cathedral. It chimed six times, sounding distant and ethereal.

Melissa tilted her head to listen to it and pulled the button up once again. Following that, she turned it to synchronize the time.

"It's okay now," she said simply without emotion. She then pressed the top button back and handed the pocket watch back to Zhou Mingrui.

Zhou Mingrui returned a smile politely in embarrassment.

Melissa gave her elder brother a piercing stare before turning to walk to the cupboard. She took her toiletries and towel before opening the door to leave. She headed for the public bathroom.

Why did her expression have a look of disparagement and resignation?

Is it a look of love and concern for a retarded brother?

Zhou Mingrui lowered his head and chuckled. He closed the pocket watch's cover with a click before opening it again.

He repeated this action as his idle thoughts focused on a question.

Klein committed suicide without a silencer. Well, I'll consider it as suicide for now. His suicide should have caused quite a commotion; yet, Melissa, who was just a wall away, did not notice it at all.

Was she sleeping too soundly? Or is Klein's suicide shrouded in mystery to begin with?

Click! The pocket watch opened. *Clack!* The pocket watch closed… Melissa returned from washing up and saw her brother's subconscious act of constantly opening and closing the pocket watch.

Her gaze was once again glazed with exasperation as she said with a sweet voice, "Klein, take out all the remaining bread. Remember to buy fresh ones today. There's meat and peas too. Your interview is soon. I'll make you mutton stewed with peas."

As she spoke, she moved a stove out from a corner. With some charcoal, she boiled a pot of hot water.

Before the water boiled, she opened the cupboard's lowest drawer and took out what seemed like a treasure—a can of inferior tea leaves. She threw about ten leaves into the pot and pretended that it was real tea.

Melissa poured two big cups of tea as she shared two pieces of rye bread with Zhou Mingrui over tea.

There is no sawdust or excessive gluten mixed in, but it is unappetizing… Zhou Mingrui still felt weak and was starving. He forced himself to swallow the bread with the tea while complaining inwardly.

Melissa finished eating a few minutes later. After she adjusted her black hair that reached down to her vest, she looked at Zhou Mingrui and said, "Remember to buy fresh bread. All we need is eight pounds. The weather is hot, so the bread will easily spoil. Also, buy the mutton and peas. Remember to buy them!"

Indeed, she was showing concern for her dull brother. She even had to repeat to emphasize it another time… Zhou Mingrui nodded with a smile.

"Alright."

Regarding the Loen Kingdom's pound, Zhou Mingrui matched Klein's muscle memory with his. He believed it was close to half a kilogram of what he was accustomed to.

Melissa did not say anything further. She stood up and tidied the area. After packing away the last bit of bread for lunch, she put on a tattered veil cap that their mother left behind, picked up a self-sewn bag used to carry her books and stationery, and prepared to leave.

It was not Sunday, so she had an entire day of classes to attend.

Walking from their apartment to Tingen Technical School took about fifty minutes. There were public horse carriages that cost a penny a kilometer with a limit of four pence in the city and six pence in the city outskirts. In order to save money, Melissa would leave ahead of time and walk to school.

Moments after she opened the main door, she paused in her footsteps and turned her body halfway, saying, "Klein, don't buy too much mutton or peas. Benson might come back on Sunday. Oh, and remember we only need eight pounds of bread."

"Alright. Sure thing," answered Zhou Mingrui in exasperation.

Simultaneously, he repeated the word 'Sunday' a few times in his head.

In the Northern Continent, a year was similarly split into twelve months. Every year, there were 365 or 366 days. A week was similarly split into seven days.

The splitting of months was a result of astronomical observations. It made Zhou Mingrui suspect whether he was in a parallel world. As for the splitting of days, it was a result of religion. This was because the Northern Continent had seven orthodox gods—the Eternal Blazing Sun, the Lord of Storms, the God of Knowledge and Wisdom, the Evernight Goddess, Earth Mother, the God of Combat, and the God of Steam and Machinery.

Watching his sister close the door and leave, Zhou Mingrui suddenly

sighed. Soon, his thoughts focused on the luck enhancement ritual.

Sorry, I really wish to return home…

4: Divination

Returning to his chair, he heard the faraway cathedral's bells chime again. It continued seven times before Zhou Mingrui slowly stood up. He went up front to the cupboard and took out his clothes.

A black vest with a matching suit, trousers that clung tightly to his legs, a half top hat and his faint scholarly air made Zhou Mingrui feel like he was watching an English drama set in the Victorian era.

He suddenly muttered softly as he shook his head with a wry smile, "I'm not going for an interview. All I'm doing is buying some ingredients to prepare for my luck enhancement ritual…"

Klein was so concerned about his impending interview that it became instinct. When he was not focused enough, he habitually wore his only decent set of clothing.

After taking a breath, Zhou Mingrui took off his suit and vest, switching to a brownish-yellow coat. He also changed to a felt hat with a rounded edge of the same color.

With his outfit done, he walked to the side of the bed and lifted a square cushion. He reached his hand into an inconspicuous hole beneath and rummaged around before finding an intermediate layer.

When he retracted his right hand, there was a roll of notes in his palm. There were about eight notes with faded dark green colors.

These were all the savings Benson had at the moment. It even included the living expenses for the next three days. Two of them were five-soli notes and the remaining were one-soli notes.

In the Loen Kingdom's currency system, soli was ranked second. It

originated from ancient silver coins. One soli was equivalent to twelve copper pence. They had denominations of one and five soli.

At the top of the currency system was the gold pound. They were also paper based but were guaranteed by gold and pegged directly. A gold pound was equivalent to twenty soli. They had denominations of one, five, and ten gold pounds.

Zhou Mingrui spread a note and caught a whiff of the faint unique ink.

This was the smell of money.

Perhaps a result of Klein's memory fragments or his constant desire for money, Zhou Mingrui felt like he had instantly fallen in love with these notes.

Behold, their designs are so beautiful. It makes the stern and old-fashioned George III and his two mustaches appear especially adorable…

Behold, the watermark that can be seen when the note is placed against sunlight is so alluring. The exquisite design for the anti-counterfeit label makes it completely different from those fake fancy schlocks!

Zhou Mingrui admired it for nearly a minute before pulling out two one-soli notes. He then rolled up the remaining notes and stuffed them back into the cushion's concealed layer.

After arranging and flattening the cloth around the hole, Zhou Mingrui folded the two notes he had taken out neatly and placed them into the left pocket of his brownish-yellow jacket. He separated the notes from the few pence he had in his trouser pocket.

With all of this done, he placed a key into his right pocket and brought a dark brownish paper bag along with him and quickly walked toward the door.

His shuffling footsteps slowed down from a brisk pace until it eventually stopped.

Zhou Mingrui stood by the door and was unsure when he had already begun to frown.

Klein's suicide was fraught with peculiarities. Would he encounter any 'accidents' if he were to leave just like that?

After some deep thought, Zhou Mingrui returned to his desk and pulled open the drawer. He then took out the shimmering brass revolver.

This was the only defensive weapon he could think of, and it was the only weapon with sufficient power!

Although he had never practiced shooting, just pulling such a revolver out would definitely daunt anyone!

He caressed the revolver's cold metal before stuffing his revolver into the pocket where his notes were. He clasped the money in his palm as his fingers pressed onto the gun's handle. It was perfectly concealed.

Feeling secure, he who knew a little of everything suddenly had a worry.

Would I end up misfiring?

Being deluged with such a thought, Zhou Mingrui quickly thought of a solution. He drew the revolver and released the cylinder. He then aligned the empty chamber which was a result of the 'suicide' along the gun's hammer before closing it.

This way, even if there was a misfire, he would discharge an 'empty round!'

After stuffing his revolver back into his pocket, Zhou Mingrui kept his left hand there.

He pressed down on his hat with his right hand and pulled open the door before leaving.

The corridor during the day remained dim as limited sunlight shone in from the window situated at the end of the corridor. Zhou Mingrui quickly went down the stairs and left the apartment before taking in the brilliance and warmth of the sun.

Although it was almost July, it was still considered the middle of summer. However, Tingen was situated north of the Loen Kingdom, so it had unique climate characteristics. The highest annual temperature was not even 30°C on Earth, with even cooler mornings. However, the streets were awash with filthy water and strewn junk. From Klein's memories, this was not a rare sight in low-income communities, even if there were sewers. After all, there were just too many people and people needed to survive.

"Come and try our delicious roasted fish!"

"Hot and fresh oyster soup. Drink a bowl in the morning and feel invigorated all day!"

"Fresh fish from the port for just five pence apiece!"

"Muffins and eel soup make the perfect combination!"

"Conch! Conch! Conch!"

"Vegetables freshly plucked from the farms outside the city. Cheap and fresh!"

…

The mobile hawkers who sold vegetables, fruits, and hot food shouted along the streets as they beckoned the rushing pedestrians. Some of them would stop and carefully compare before purchasing. Others would impatiently wave their hands as they had yet to find work for the day.

Zhou Mingrui took in a whiff of the air that mixed both noxious and fragrant aromas. As he clenched the revolver tightly in his left hand which held the notes tight, he pressed down on his hat with his right hand while passing through the busy street with a tiny slouch.

There were bound to be thieves in populated areas. Furthermore, this street had no lack of poor citizens who were working part time after losing their previous jobs. There were also starving children that were exploited by adults to do their bidding.

He proceeded forward until he reached a point where the

crowdedness around him restored to normal. He straightened his back and raised his head to look down the street.

There was a vagrant accordionist busking. The melody was sometimes pleasant, sometimes fervent.

Beside him were several children in ragged clothes with sallow complexions due to malnutrition.

They listened to the music and moved to the beat, dancing self-made choreographies. Their faces were filled with joy as though they were a prince or an angel.

A deadpan woman passed by; her skirt was dirty and her skin was dull.

Her gaze appeared dull and sluggish. Only when she looked at the bunch of children did a faint glow flash. It was as though she had seen herself from three decades ago.

Zhou Mingrui overtook her and turned into another street before stopping at Smyrin Bakery.

The owner of the bakery was a seventy-plus year old granny named Wendy Smyrin. Her hair was completely grayish-white and she always wore a genial smile. From the beginning of Klein's memories, she had been here selling bread and pastries.

Oh, the Tingen biscuits and lemon cakes she bakes are very delicious…

Zhou Mingrui gulped a mouthful of saliva and smiled.

"Mrs. Smyrin, eight pounds of rye bread."

"Oh. Dear Klein, where's Benson? Is he not back?" Wendy asked smilingly.

"In a few more days," answered Zhou Mingrui vaguely.

As Wendy took the rye bread, she sighed. "He sure is a hardworking lad. He will have a good wife."

Upon saying this, the corners of her lips curled up as she said playfully, "All is good now. You have already graduated. You are a history graduate of our Khoy University~ Oh, you will soon be able to earn money. You should not be staying in the apartment you are currently living in. At the very least, you should have a bathroom you can call your own."

"Mrs. Smyrin, you seem to be a young and energetic woman today." All Zhou Mingrui could do was respond with a dry smile.

If Klein were to successfully pass his interview and become a lecturer at Tingen University, it was true that his family would immediately be pushed up to a higher socioeconomic status!

In his memory fragments, he had once fantasized about renting a detached house in the suburbs. Upstairs, there would be five or six rooms, two bathrooms, and a huge balcony. On the first floor, there would be two rooms, a dining room, a living room, a kitchen, and a bathroom. It would also come with an underground storage room.

This was not a wishful dream. Even a lecturer on probation at Tingen University would have a weekly salary of two gold pounds. After the probationary period, the salary would be raised to three gold pounds and ten soli. One had to know that despite working for so many years, Klein's brother, Benson, only had a weekly salary of one pound and ten soli. Ordinary workers at a factory did not even get a pound or, at best, a little more. And rent for a bungalow was about nineteen soli to one pound and eighteen soli.

"This is the difference between earning three to four thousand yuan and earning fourteen to fifteen thousand yuan a month…" Zhou Mingrui mumbled to himself.

However, all of this was under the premise that he passed either the Tingen University or Backlund University interviews.

There were not many other opportunities. People without any connections were unable to get recommendations to become a public servant. And those who studied history were more limited in job opportunities. There was not much demand for private consultants from the aristocrats, banks, or industrial magnates.

Taking into account that the knowledge Klein grasped was fragmented and incomplete, Zhou Mingrui felt awkward and guilty towards Mrs. Smyrin's expectations of him.

"No, I have always been this young," answered Wendy humorously.

As she spoke, she packed the sixteen rye bread she had weighed into the brown paper bag that Zhou Mingrui had brought. She stretched out her right hand and said, "Nine pence."

Every rye bread weighed about half a pound as differences were inevitable.

"Nine pence? Wasn't it eleven pence two days ago?" Zhou Mingrui asked subconsciously.

It cost 15 pence the month before the previous month.

"You have to thank the people who protested on the streets for the repeal of the Grain Act," said Wendy as she shrugged.

Zhou Mingrui nodded in vague acknowledgment. Klein's memories regarding this were incomplete. All he remembered was that the core tenet of the Grain Act was to protect the prices of domestic agriculture products. Before the prices rose to a certain level, grain imports from Southern nations like Feynapotter, Masin, Lenburg were stopped.

Why would people protest the act?

Without saying much, Zhou Mingrui, afraid he would end up pulling out the revolver, carefully took out his notes and handed one of them over to Mrs. Smyrin.

He was given three copper pence in change. Stuffing them into his trouser pocket, he took the paper bag containing the bread and headed for the 'Lettuce and Meat' market across the street. He was working hard for the mutton stewed with peas his sister had exhorted.

There was a municipal square at the intersection of Iron Cross Street and Daffodil Street. Many tents were erected there, and clowns

dressed in odd and funny attires were distributing fliers.

"There's a circus performance tomorrow night?" Zhou Mingrui glanced at the fliers in the hands of others as he read their contents under his breath.

Melissa would definitely like it. However, how much is the entrance fee?

With that thought, Zhou Mingrui went closer.

Just as he was about to ask a clown with a red and yellow painted face, a hoarse woman's voice sounded from beside him.

"Would you like to try a divination?"

Zhou Mingrui subconsciously turned his head and saw a woman wearing a pointed hat and a long black dress standing in front of a short tent.

Her face was smeared with red and yellow paint and her eyes were a profound grayish-blue.

"No," Zhou Mingrui shook his head in response. He did not have the spare cash for divination.

The woman laughed and said, "My tarot divination is very accurate."

"Tarot…" Zhou Mingrui was instantly dumbfounded.

This pronunciation was almost identical to the tarot cards on Earth!

And tarot cards from Earth were a set of cards used for divination. They just had graphics that represented different omens.

Wait… He suddenly recalled the origins of tarot divination in this world.

It did not originate from the seven orthodox gods nor was it an ancient legacy. Instead, it was created by the Intis Republic's Consul of that era, Roselle Gustav, more than 170 years ago.

This Mr. Roselle invented the steam engine, improved the sailing

boat, overthrew the Intis Kingdom's imperial rule, and was recognized by the God of Craftsmanship. He also became the first Consul of the Intis Republic.

Later, he invaded other nations and placed Lenburg and other nations under his protection. He made the Loen Kingdom, Feynapotter, Feysac Empire and other powerful Northern Continent nations bow down to the Intis Republic. Following that, the Republic was then changed to an Empire and he became the self-proclaimed 'Emperor Caesar.'

It was during Roselle's rule that the Church of Craftsmanship received its first public holy revelation since the Fifth Epoch. Ever since, the God of Craftsmanship was changed to the God of Steam and Machinery.

Roselle also invented tarot divination. He also established the contemporary system of paper-based cards and their playstyles. There were many familiar styles that Zhou Mingrui was familiar with, such as Upgrade, Fighting the Landlord, Texas Poker, and Quint…

In addition, the marine fleets he sent out discovered a sea route that led to the Southern Continent through the stormy and turbulent seas. This also began the era of colonialism.

Unfortunately, he was betrayed in his old age. In the year 1198 of the Fifth Epoch, he was assassinated by the combined forces of the Church of the Eternal Blazing Sun, the former Intis royal family—the Sauron family—and other aristocrats. He eventually died in the White Maple Palace.

What… To recall such general knowledge suddenly made him facepalm.

Could this be a transmigration senior?

With this in mind, Zhou Mingrui was intrigued to see what tarot cards looked like. Therefore, he nodded at the pointy hat woman with the painted face and said, "If the… well… price is reasonable, I'll give it a try."

The woman immediately said with a laugh, "Sir, you are the first one here today, so it's on the house."

5: Ritual

Free? Free things cost the most!

Zhou Mingrui silently mumbled and decided that he would not purchase any additional services whatsoever. He would firmly refuse them all.

If you are really that capable, try divining that I transmigrated here!

With this in mind, Zhou Mingrui followed behind the woman whose face was painted red and yellow, stooping low to enter the low tent.

The tent's interior was extremely dark, illuminated only by several beams of light that managed to seep inside. A table covered with paper cards could be made out faintly in the low illumination.

The woman with the sharp pointy hat was not affected by this at all. Her long black dress glided as though it was moving over water while she went around to the table. She sat on the opposite side and lit a candle.

The dim yellow light flickered, causing the inside of the tent to appear bright and dark at the same time. It instantly added a much more mysterious feel to the atmosphere.

Zhou Mingrui sat down quietly, his gaze sweeping over the tarot cards on the table where he discovered familiar cards like "The Magician," "The Emperor," "The Hanged Man," and "Temperance," etc.

Could Roselle have been a 'senior'… I wonder if he was also a fellow countryman of mine… Zhou Mingrui mumbled to himself subconsciously.

Before he could finish looking at the opened cards on the table, the woman who claimed to have accurate divinations had already reached out her hands to gather all of the cards together. She stacked them into a deck and pushed it in front of him.

"Shuffle the cards first and cut the deck," the circus fortune-teller said in a muted voice.

"Me? Shuffle?" Zhou Mingrui asked reflexively.

The yellow and red paint on the fortune-teller's face squirmed together as she revealed a slight smile, saying, "Of course, everyone's destiny can only be unraveled by themselves. I only serve as a reader of it."

Zhou Mingrui immediately questioned her warily, "This reading does not require additional fees, right?"

As a keyboard folklorist, I've already seen too many of such tricks!

The fortune-teller was visibly taken aback before finally saying muffledly, "It's free."

Zhou Mingrui, relieved, stuffed the revolver further back into his pocket. Thereafter, he calmly reached out his two hands to shuffle and cut the deck skillfully.

"It's done." He placed the already shuffled tarot cards in the middle of the table.

The fortune-teller clasped the cards with both her hands and carefully looked at cards for a while. Then, she suddenly opened her mouth and said, "I'm sorry, I forgot to ask, but what would you like to ask about?"

Back when he was wooing his first love, Zhou Mingrui had also done research on tarot cards. He asked unhesitatingly, "Past, present, and future."

This was a type of divination as part of tarot card interpretation—three cards when opened sequentially symbolized one's past, present, and future.

The fortune-teller nodded first, then curled her lips to reveal a smile and said, "Then please reshuffle the deck. You can only truly get the cards you want if you know what you would like to ask about."

Were you fooling me just now? Do you have to be this petty? Didn't I only ask a few times if this would be a free service? Zhou Mingrui's cheeks twitched a little. He took a deep breath and took the tarot deck back to reshuffle and cut it.

"There won't be any problems this time, right?" He placed the already cut deck back onto the table.

"No problem." The fortune-teller reached out her fingers and picked a card from the top of the deck. Then she placed it on the left side of Zhou Mingrui. Her voice was going lower and lower as she spoke, "This card symbolizes your past."

"This card symbolizes your present." The fortune-teller placed the second card right in front of Zhou Mingrui.

Then, she picked the third card and put it on the right side of Zhou Mingrui.

"This card symbolizes the future."

"Alright, which card would you like to see first?" The fortune-teller raised her head up after completing her placement of the cards and gazed deeply at Zhou Mingrui with her grayish-blue eyes.

"I'll have a look at the 'present' first," Zhou Mingrui said after giving it some thought.

The fortune-teller nodded slowly and flipped over the tarot card that was directly in front of Zhou Mingrui.

A colorfully dressed character was depicted on this card, wearing splendid headgear with a stick over his shoulder. There was a bindle hanging on the end of the stick and a puppy was following behind him. It was numbered "0."

"The Fool," the fortune-teller lightly read out the name of the card with her grayish-blue eyes affixed on Zhou Mingrui.

The Fool? The "0" card of tarot? A start? A fresh beginning with all kinds of possibilities? Zhou Mingrui was not even considered an amateur enthusiast of tarot, so he could only make a rough interpretation based on his own impressions of tarot.

Just as the fortune-teller was about to say something, the cloth curtains of the tent were suddenly lifted open. The ray of sunlight that shone in was so blinding that it caused the back-facing Zhou Mingrui to instinctively narrow his eyes.

"Why are you impersonating me again! It's my job to handle the divination for people!" a woman's voice growled angrily. "Return to your post quickly! You must remember that you're just an animal trainer!"

An animal trainer? Zhou Mingrui's eyes had already adapted to the light by now. He saw a similar-looking woman who was also wearing a sharp pointy hat in a black dress, with her face painted in red and yellow as well. The only difference was that she was taller and had a slimmer physique.

The woman who was seated in front of him immediately stood up and said disgruntledly, "Don't mind this, it's just that I like doing this. But I have to say, my divination and interpretation can be really accurate sometimes. I'm serious…"

She spoke and lifted up her dress to go around from the side of the table before quickly trotting away from the tent.

"Sir, would you like me to interpret your cards for you?" the real fortune-teller looked at Zhou Mingrui and asked with a smile.

Zhou Mingrui's lips twitched and asked her sincerely, "Is it free?"

"…No," the real fortune-teller answered.

"Then forget it." Zhou Mingrui pulled his hands back and put them into his pockets. He clutched his revolver and money before stooping again to exit the tent.

Damn! He actually got an animal trainer to be his fortune-teller?

Is an animal trainer who doesn't want to be a fortune-teller a bad clown?

Zhou Mingrui very quickly put this matter behind him. He spent seven pence at the 'Lettuce and Meat' market for a pound of not-so-great mutton. Then, he also bought some tender broad beans, cabbage, onions, potatoes, and other items. Together with the bread that he bought earlier, he spent a total of 25 copper pennies, which converted to two soli and one pence.

"There is really not enough to go around for spending. Poor Benson…" Not only had Zhou Mingrui spent the two notes that he had brought with him, but it was also necessary for him to top it up with the one penny he had in his pocket.

He just sighed and did not think further about it as he hurried back home.

With the staple food, he could now carry out the luck enhancement ritual!

…

After the second-floor tenants gradually left, Zhou Mingrui was still in no hurry to carry out the ritual. Instead, he translated the "The Immortal Lord of Heaven and Earth for Blessings" and related phrases into the ancient Feysac language, as well as the Loen language. He was intending to try the ritual again the next day in those local languages if the original incantation did not take effect!

After all, he had to take into consideration the differences between the two worlds. In Rome, do as the Romans do!

As for translating it into an ancient ritual prayer that used the dedicated Hermes language, Zhou Mingrui had a difficult time completing it due to his lack of vocabulary.

After readying everything, he finally took out the four loaves of rye bread. He placed one in the corner where the coal stove was originally, one at the bottom inner side of the dress mirror, one at the top of the cupboard where two walls met, and one at the right side of the study table where miscellaneous items were kept.

With a deep breath, Zhou Mingrui came to the center of the room and spent a few minutes to calm himself. Then, he took a solemn step forward and went in a counter-clockwise direction in the shape of a square.

When he took the first step, he chanted in a low whisper, "The Immortal Lord of Heaven and Earth for Blessings."

The second step, he sincerely chanted, "The Sky Lord of Heaven and Earth for Blessings."

The third step, Zhou Mingrui breathed out a whisper. "The Exalted Thearch of Heaven and Earth for Blessings."

At the fourth step, he spat out a foul breath and meditated in concentration. "The Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings."

When he returned back to the original spot, Zhou Mingrui closed his eyes and waited in his place for an outcome. He had some anticipation in him, some unease, some hope, and some fear.

Can he make it back?

Is there going to be any effect?

Will there be an unexpected situation?

The darkness in front of him was tainted with the crimson light of hope. Zhou Mingrui's thoughts were swirling in his head and he was finding it difficult to quell it.

It was at this time that he suddenly felt the surrounding air seem to stop, becoming thick and mysterious.

Immediately after, a low whisper could be heard beside his ears that sounded at times real, at times sharp, at times imaginary, at times alluring, at times maniacal, and at times crazy.

He clearly did not understand the murmuring that went on, but Zhou Mingrui still couldn't help himself from wanting to listen to it and distinguish what it was saying.

His head was in pain again. It was so painful that it felt like someone had stuck a steel drill rod into it.

Zhou Mingrui only felt like his head was going to explode. His thoughts were filled with psychedelic colors.

He knew that something was wrong and tried to open his eyes. However, he wasn't even able to complete such a simple action.

His entire body was getting tighter and tighter and it felt like he could just break apart at any time. At this time, a self-mocking thought came up in Zhou Mingrui's mind:

You wouldn't die if you didn't court death…

He could no longer bear it. Just as his mind was going to break, the murmuring of voices faded away and his surroundings became very quiet. The mood was an erratic one.

It was not only the mood; Zhou Mingrui felt his own body going through the same sensations as well.

He tried once more to open his eyes, an extremely easy task this time.

A gray fog appeared over his eyes—haziness, vague, and endless.

"What's with this situation?" Zhou Mingrui suddenly looked around him and then lowered his head down to discover that he was floating at the edge of an endless fog.

The fog was flowing like water and was dotted with a lot of crimson 'stars.' Some of them were enormous while others were tiny. There was a sense of them being hidden in the deep depths, while others floated over the surface of this water-like fog.

Looking at the seemingly holographic sight, Zhou Mingrui reached out his right hand in a half-confused, half-exploring manner to try to touch the crimson 'star' that was seemingly floating on the surface. He was trying to find a way to leave this place.

When his hand touched the surface of that star, a water mark suddenly appeared from within his body and agitated the stars into a

"crimson" burst. It looked like a dreamlike burning of flames.

Zhou Mingrui got a fright from it. He retracted his right hand in a panic, but accidentally touched yet another crimson star.

As a result, this star burst with splendid light as well.

In turn, Zhou Mingrui felt his mind empty and his spirit dissipated.

…

In the Loen Kingdom's capital, Backlund. Inside a luxurious looking villa at the royal district.

Audrey Hall sat in front of a dresser. The markings on it were antiquated and there was a cracked bronze mirror on the surface.

"Mirror, mirror, awaken…

"In the name of the Hall family, I command you to awaken!"

…

She switched between many different sayings, but there was no reaction from the mirror at all.

After more than 10 minutes, she finally chose to give up and pouted her lips in grievance. She said in a soft murmur, "Father was indeed lying to me. He always tells me that this mirror was the treasure of the Solomon Empire's Black Emperor, and that it is an extraordinary item…"

Her voice trailed off. The bronze mirror which rested on the dresser suddenly glowed with a crimson light that shrouded her completely.

…

In the Sonia Sea, a three-masted sailboat that looked like an obvious relic was navigating through a storm.

Alger Wilson stood on deck, his body undulating with the currents at sea, maintaining his balance easily.

Dressed in a lightning-embroidered robe, he held an oddly-shaped glass bottle that displayed ever-changing wonders: churning bubbles one moment, frost crystallizing into snow the next, then swirling winds leaving ghostly traces.

"Still short on the Ghost Shark's blood…" Alger murmured.

Then at this moment, a crimson burst appeared in the space between the glass bottle and the surface of his palm. In an instant, it enveloped the surroundings as well.

…

In the fog of gray mist, Audrey Hall regained her sight. She started reckoning the situation in a state of horror and confusion when she noticed the blurry image of a man on the opposite side of her doing the same as well.

Immediately after, the both of them discovered another mystery person standing not far from them who was shrouded in a gray mist.

The 'mysterious person' was none other than Zhou Mingrui. He was similarly dumbfounded.

"Sir, where is this?"

Audrey and Alger were startled at first, falling silent in the process. Then, they immediately started speaking in unison.

"What are you planning on doing?"

6: Beyonder

Not only did they speak the same Loen language, they also shared the same grim and tense vibes.

Where am I? What do I plan to do here? I would like to know too… Calming himself down, Zhou Mingrui silently repeated the questions posed by the two.

What left the deepest impression on him were neither the sentences formed by words nor the meanings behind them, but the display of bewilderment, vigilance, panic, and reverence by the couple!

For some baffling reason, two people had been mysteriously dragged into this world surrounded by gray fog. As the perpetrator, Zhou Mingrui was already feeling abnormally dumbfounded and startled, let alone the couple who was pulled into this mess completely passively!

For them, such events and encounters might already be beyond their imaginations, right?

Momentarily, Zhou Mingrui thought of two options: The first option was feigning victimhood to hide his true identity, and in turn gain a considerable amount of trust. He could then take a wait-and-see approach and take advantage of his circumstances where necessary. The other option was to maintain his mysterious identity in the eyes of the couple. He could then affect the subsequent development while gleaning valuable information from them.

Without the luxury of time to deliberate over the situation, he grasped hold of the thought that flashed across his mind. He made an immediate decision to try out the second idea.

Exploit the psychological state of the others to gain the greatest advantage for himself!

After a few seconds of silence in the fog, Zhou Mingrui chuckled. With a low but not heavy tone, he calmly spoke as though he was replying to the polite greetings from the visitors, "An attempt."

An attempt… an attempt? Audrey Hall looked at the mysterious guy veiled in the grayish-white fog, and the only thought was that whatever was happening was absurd, funny, horrifying, and weird.

She was at the dressing table inside her bedroom only moments ago. But just by turning around, she had "come" to this place that was filled with gray fog!

How inconceivable!

Audrey took a breath, revealing an impeccable, courteous smile. She asked in a somewhat perturbed way, "Sir, is the attempt over? Might you permit our return?"

Alger Wilson also had the intentions to probe Zhou Mingrui in a similar fashion, but his rich experience made him statelier. He held back his impulse and only took on the role of a silent onlooker.

Zhou Mingrui looked at the questioner. Looking through the hazy mist, he could roughly see the silhouette of the person in question. It was a tall girl with smooth blond hair, but her exact countenance could not be seen clearly.

He did not rush to reply to the girl's question but turned around to look at the man. He had messy dark-blue hair, as well as a medium stature that was not considered stout.

Zhou Mingrui suddenly realized something. Once he became stronger or had a deeper understanding of the foggy world, perhaps it was possible for him to see through the fog and discern the girl and the man.

In this situation, they are the visitors, and I'm the master!

After changing his mindset, Zhou Mingrui instantly noticed details

that he had neglected earlier on.

The girl with a melodious voice and the mature, withdrawn man both looked considerably incorporeal. Tainted by a faint crimson red, they resembled a projected image of the two crimson red "stars" beyond the gray fog.

This projection was based on the connection between the crimson red and himself, an intangible connection that only he himself could realistically grasp hold of.

The projection would disappear once the connection is cut, and the couple would then return… Zhou Mingrui nodded mildly and looked at the blond, chuckling. "Of course, if you make a formal request, you can return this very moment."

When she did not identify any ill intention from his tone, Audrey heaved a sigh of relief. She believed that since a gentleman who was capable of such miraculous things had given his word, he would definitely abide by it stringently.

With her mind somewhat mollified, she surprisingly was in no hurry to request her leave. She rolled her virid eyes left and right, which sparkled with an abnormal radiance.

She said in an anxious, anticipative and tempted manner, "This is such a wonderful experience… Yes, I have always been hoping that something like this would happen. I mean—I like mysteries and supernatural miracles. No, my point is—what I mean is that, Sir, what can I do to become a Beyonder?"

She got more excited as she spoke, so much so that she was fumbling over her words. The dream that sprouted in her as a result of listening to thrilling fantasies as told by her elders finally saw the possibility of being materialized.

However, with just a few words, she had already forgotten all her previous fears and horrors.

Good question! I would also like to know the answer… Zhou Mingrui complained inwardly.

He started to ponder on an answer to the question to maintain his unfathomable image.

At the same time, he felt that it was quite unbecoming of him to talk while standing. Shouldn't he be in a palace, sitting at the head of a long table, and on a mysterious high-back chair engraved with ancient patterns, while silently observing his visitors?

As soon as this thought surfaced, the gray fog started to churn, giving both Audrey and Alger a shock.

In an instant, they saw a number of towering stone pillars around them. Above them was a vast dome that encapsulated them.

This entire edifice looked magnificent, grand and lofty, just like a legendary palace for giants.

Directly under the dome where the gray fog gathered, a long, bronze table appeared with ten high-back chairs on either side in a symmetrical arrangement, along with a chair on each of the two ends of the long table. The back of each chair dazzled and shone faintly with crimson red, drawing the outlines of weird constellations that differed from reality.

Audrey and Alger sat face-to-face, sitting next to the Seat of Honor.

The girl looked to her sides, and could not help but mumble, "How fascinating…"

It is certainly fascinating… Zhou Mingrui extended his right hand and caressed the edge of the bronze table a little while maintaining an unperturbed expression.

Alger inspected the surroundings, and after a few seconds of silence, he suddenly opened his mouth, and answered Audrey's question in place of Zhou Mingrui.

"Are you from Loen?

"If you want to become a Beyonder, join the Churches of either the Evernight Goddess, the Lord of Storms, or the God of Steam and Machinery.

"The majority of us will not meet a Beyonder our entire lives. This has caused Churches, and even some clergymen within some of the biggest Churches, to suspect the same. While this is the case, I am certain to tell you that Beyonders still exist in courts, tribunals, and execution agencies. They are still fighting against the dangers that grow in the dark, only that their numbers are much fewer as compared to before and during the early days of the Iron Age."

Zhou Mingrui listened attentively, but he tried his best to present himself as paying little attention to Alger's words, much like how he was listening to kids telling stories.

Relying on Klein's fragmented general knowledge of history, Zhou Mingrui knew clearly that the "Iron Age" referred to the current epoch, which was the Fifth Epoch that began 1349 years ago.

Audrey silently listened to Alger finish his sentence before sighing.

"Mister, I know all about what you just said; I even know more than that, including the Nighthawks, the Mandated Punishers, and the Machinery Hivemind, but I don't want to lose my freedom."

Alger gave a low-sounding laugh, and said vaguely, "You can't become a Beyonder without sacrifices. If you don't consider joining Churches and accepting their given challenges, you can only seek the royal families and the few nobles with family histories of more than a thousand years. If not, you can rely on your luck to search for clandestine evil organizations."

Audrey puffed her cheeks subconsciously and looked around in a fluster. After confirming that both the "mysterious man" and Alger did not notice her tic, she pressed, "Are there no other solutions?"

Alger sank into silence. About half a minute later, he turned around to look at the "mysterious man" who was watching the two of them in silence.

Realizing that Zhou Mingrui had no plans to make any comment, he looked back at Audrey and said with deliberation, "I have two sets of Sequence 9 potion formulas."

Sequence 9? Zhou Mingrui muttered to himself.

"Really? Which two sets?" Audrey clearly knew what the Sequence 9 potion formulas meant.

Alger leaned back slightly, and replied unhurriedly, "As you know, humanity can only depend on potions to become real Beyonders, while the names of potions come from the 'Blasphemy Slate.' After constant translations into Jotun[1], Elvish, ancient and modern Hermes, and ancient Feysac, they have undergone changes to match the day and age of the times. The essence is not in their names, but whether they portray the 'core characteristics' of the potions.

"I have a Sequence 9 Potion named 'Sailor.' It enables you to have excellent balancing capabilities. Even if you were on a boat in a rainstorm, you will be able to walk about freely as though you were on land. You will also gain immense strength and illusory scales under your skin. They will enable you to swim like a fish and be difficult to catch. You will move agilely underwater just like marine animals. Even without any equipment, you will be able to easily submerge underwater for at least ten minutes."

"Sounds great… the 'Keepers of the Seas' from the Lord of Storms?"

"It was called by that name in the past." Alger did not pause and continued. "The second Sequence 9 potion is called 'Spectator.' Although I am not sure what it was called in the past. This set of potions enables you to have an exceptionally sharp mind with acute observational abilities. I believe you can understand what 'spectator' means from watching operas and plays. Just like an audience, spectators judge the 'actors' in the secular world, catching a glimpse of the real thoughts of them through their emotions, conduct, and mantras."

At this point, Alger emphasized, "You must remember, regardless of whether you are at an extravagant banquet or a crowded street, spectators can only be spectators forever."

Audrey's eyes shone as she listened, and spoke after a long while, "Why? Alright, this is a follow-up question. I-I think I have fallen in love with this feeling—of being a 'Spectator.' How can I get this

potion's formula? What can I use to trade with you for it?"

Alger looked like he was already prepared as he said in a deep voice, "The blood of Ghost Sharks, at least 100 milliliters of it."

Audrey nodded excitedly, but subsequently asked worriedly, "If I can get it—and I'm saying if—how do I hand it to you? How can you promise me that you can give the potion's formula to me in return for the Ghost Shark's blood, as well as the authenticity of the formula?"

Alger said calmly, "I'll give you an address. I'll mail the formula to you, or tell you directly here, once I receive the blood of the Ghost Shark."

"As for promises, I think that both you and I can feel assured under the witness of the mysterious sir."

As he said this, he swept his eyes towards Zhou Mingrui who was sitting up straight at the Seat of Honor.

"Sir, the fact that you brought us here shows that you have tremendous strength unimaginable to us. Neither one of us would dare violate a promise with you as a witness."

"That's right!" Audrey's eyes sparkled and agreed with excitement.

From her perspective, the mysterious gentleman who had unimaginable abilities was definitely an "authoritative" witness.

How could I or the guy opposite me dare trick him!

Audrey half-turned her body and looked at Zhou Mingrui earnestly.

"Sir, please be the witness of our trade."

At that moment, she then realized that she was all too impolite, having forgotten all along to ask a particular question. She asked hurriedly, "Sir, how should we address you?"

Alger nodded slightly, and echoed the same question in a serious manner, "Sir, how should we address you?"

Zhou Mingrui was taken aback. He gently rapped his fingers on the bronze table. The contents of the earlier divination flashed across his mind suddenly.

He leaned back, withdrew his right hand, and crossed his ten fingers, placing them below his chin. He gave the duo a faint smile.

"You can address me as…"

Upon saying this, he paused for a moment. He said amiably and calmly, "The Fool."

1. Language of Giants.

7: Code Names

"You can address me as The Fool."

The simple answer soon emanated through the grand hall and dissipated into the fog. However, the voice kept resonating in Audrey's and Alger's hearts, stirring up one ripple after another.

They never expected such a designation, but they felt that he was deserving of it. The designation perfectly embodied his image as someone mysterious, powerful, and bizarre!

After a few seconds of silence, Audrey stood up, held up her skirt slightly and bent her knees, curtseying to Zhou Mingrui.

"Honorable Mr. Fool, would you please permit me to take the liberty of requesting you to be the witness of our trade?"

"It's nothing." Zhou Mingrui's mind whirred as he answered in a way that matched his status.

"It's our honor, Mr. Fool." Alger stood up as well. He bent his back slightly with his right palm over his chest.

Zhou Mingrui lowered his right palm and smiled.

"Continue, the both of you."

Alger nodded and sat back down before looking at Audrey.

"If you can obtain the Ghost Shark's blood, get someone to send it to the Warrior & Sea Bar at Pelican Street, in the White Rose Borough of Pritz Harbor. Tell the boss, Williams, that it's what the 'Captain' wants.

"Once I acknowledge receipt, will you be giving me an address to mail the potion formula to or do you want me to tell it to you here directly?"

Audrey thought for a moment before saying with a smile, "I will choose the more secure method. Let's do it here, although it's a test of my memory."

Since Mr. Fool had agreed to bear witness for the trade, it also represented that there would be a similar 'gathering' the next time.

With this in mind, she suddenly turned her head as she looked at Zhou Mingrui with sparkling eyes. With a tone of interest, she suggested, "Mr. Fool, would you mind making a few more 'attempts' like this?"

Alger listened to her suggestion calmly; he was tempted by the suggestion as well. He hurriedly echoed, "Mr. Fool, don't you find such 'gatherings' interesting? Although your powers exceed our imaginations, there has to be certain domains that you don't understand or excel in. The person across from me is obviously a young lady of lofty stature. I also have my unique set of experiences, insights, mediums, and resources. Perhaps there will come a day when both of us can help you complete something trivial that might be inconvenient for you."

From his point of view, the fact that he had been pulled into this space without any warning or any means to resist meant that the mysterious Mr. Fool was in control. Participating in the 'gatherings' was not necessarily something he could refuse. Therefore, it was better to reap the benefits of this encounter as much as he could to make up for his passive and disadvantaged state.

The trio at the long table had different backgrounds, resources, information channels, and comprehension of the mystical domain. If they interacted and enjoyed some limited cooperation, they could produce unpredictable and immeasurable effects!

The resource trade that had just been negotiated was one example. Another example would be if he wished to kill someone. He could easily request the gathering's members who did not appear to be

related to him both on the surface and in reality for help. He could perfectly misdirect any investigators.

A young lady of lofty stature… Was my behavior and accent that obvious? Audrey stared blankly, mouth slightly agape, but she soon jolted back to her senses and nodded without any hesitation.

"Mr. Fool, I think it's a very good suggestion. As long as this gathering becomes regular, you can totally leave certain things that are inconvenient for you to us. Of course, it has to be something within our capacities."

From the moment he heard the suggestion, Zhou Mingrui was already weighing the pros and cons. More gatherings definitely allowed him to gain more knowledge of the secrets of the Beyonders or other mysteries, a boon for his transmigration back. For example, it was likely that the Spectator potion formula would appear at the next gathering. Similarly, the information he gained was bound to be helpful for his present life.

However, more gatherings meant it was easier to expose himself!

Indeed, regardless of the world, there is no such thing as a free lunch… Zhou Mingrui extended his right hand again as he rapped the side of the long table with his finger gently.

Considering the fact that he was in control of the gathering's summoning and dismissal, any threat of exposure was within the confines of his control. The pros clearly exceeded the cons, so Zhou Mingrui rapidly made a decision.

He stopped his rapping as he smiled at the anticipative and perturbed gazes of the duo.

"I'm a person who likes a fair and equal exchange.

"Your help will not go unrewarded.

"Every Monday at three in the afternoon, try your best to be alone. After I make a few more attempts and figure out certain things, perhaps you can apply for a leave of absence ahead of time. You will no longer need to worry about being in inappropriate situations."

This was a form of agreement to Alger's and Audrey's suggestions.

Audrey had just turned seventeen. Having been taken care of her entire life, she had the character of a young girl. Therefore, she could not help but clench her fist and gradually pump it in front of her chest when she heard The Fool's reply.

Without waiting for Alger to say a word, Audrey said in excitement, her eyes glowing, "Then, shall we give ourselves code names? After all, we can't use our real names for conversation."

Although I might not be able to deceive Mr. Fool regarding my true identity, the person opposite me poses some danger. I must not let him know who I am!

"Good idea," answered Zhou Mingrui in a simple and relaxed manner.

Audrey's mind immediately began whirring as she aired her thoughts as they came to her.

"You are Mr. Fool which is derived from tarot cards. Then, as a fixed, long-term, and secretive 'gathering,' we should be uniform in our designations. Yes, I'll also choose one from the tarot cards."

Her tone slowly turned joyous.

"I've decided. My designation shall be 'Justice!'"

It was one of the twenty-two Major Arcana tarot cards.

"What about you, Mister?" Audrey cheekily smiled at her 'partner' sitting across from her.

Alger frowned slightly before relaxing it immediately.

"The Hanged Man."

It was another Major Arcana card.

"Alright, then we can be considered as the founding members of the Tarot Club!" Audrey was the first to blurt it out happily, only to look fearfully at the fog-concealed Zhou Mingrui. "Will that be alright, Mr.

Fool?"

Zhou Mingrui shook his head in amusement.

"You can decide on such trivial matters by yourselves."

"Thank you!" Audrey was clearly thrilled.

Following that, she looked at Alger.

"Mr. Hanged Man, can you repeat the address again once more? I'm afraid that my memories will fail me."

"No problem." Alger was very pleased with Audrey's seriousness as he repeated the address once more.

After repeating it to herself silently thrice, Audrey said again in excitement, "I heard that tarot cards were invented by Emperor Roselle as a game. In fact, doesn't it come equipped with the power to divine the future?"

"No. Most of the time, divination stems from one's self. Everyone has something spiritual about themselves, allowing them to attune to the spiritual world and connect to information about themselves at an even higher level. However, ordinary folks are unable to notice this, much less be able to interpret the 'signs' they receive. This information will present itself with the help of divination tools. Let me raise a simple example, dreams and dream interpreters." Alger took a glance at Zhou Mingrui and seeing no response from him, he refuted Audrey's claim. "Tarot cards are, in fact, such a tool. It uses more symbolism and more logical elements to help us in conveniently and accurately interpreting the signs."

Although Zhou Mingrui appeared indifferent, he was actually listening very carefully. It was only at this point that his empty mind slowly became heavy as his head began to feel a throbbing pain.

"Got it." Audrey nodded in agreement. Following that, she emphasized, "That's not what I meant. I'm not doubting the tarot cards, but I heard that Emperor Roselle had actually created another set of cards, secret and mysterious ones. They were paper cards which symbolized a particular unknown power. There were a total of

twenty-two cards that he completed. Later on in life, he referenced them to create the twenty-two Major Arcana tarot cards which are used as a gaming tool. Was what I said correct?"

She looked at Zhou Mingrui as though she was attempting to get an answer from the mysterious Mr. Fool.

All Zhou Mingrui did was smile without saying a word. He cast his gaze at The Hanged Man as though he was putting him to the test.

Alger subconsciously straightened his back and said in a deep voice, "That's right. It is said that Emperor Roselle had seen the Blasphemy Slate and that set of paper cards contain the profound mysteries of the twenty-two paths of the divine."

"Twenty-two paths of the divine…" repeated Audrey with a longing tone.

At that moment, Zhou Mingrui's headache intensified. He felt that his invisible connection with the crimson stars and grayish-white fog was beginning to falter.

"Alright, that will be all for today's gathering," he said in a deep voice after making the decision immediately.

"By your will." Alger bowed his head respectfully.

"By your will." Audrey mimicked The Hanged Man.

She still had many questions and thoughts; thus, she was unwilling to have it end so soon.

As Zhou Mingrui severed the connection, he said with a smile, "Let us look forward to the next gathering."

The 'stars' brightened once more as the crimson light receded like water. Just as Audrey and Alger heard Mr. Fool's words, their figures turned into a blur as they phased away.

In a second, the 'projection' shattered as the gray fog restored its silence.

As for Zhou Mingrui, he felt himself turning heavy rapidly. His surroundings turned fleeting as his eyes met darkness before changing into dazzling sunlight.

He was still standing in the middle of his apartment.

"It was like a dream… What the heck was that foggy world… Who or what sort of power created the changes that just happened…" Zhou Mingrui sighed softly. He was completely puzzled as he walked towards the study desk as though his legs were filled with lead.

He picked up the pocket watch he placed outside to determine how much time had passed.

"Time flowed at the same pace." Zhou Mingrui made a rough judgment.

After putting down his pocket watch, he found himself unable to endure the splitting headache any further. He sat on the chair and lowered his head, using his left thumb and middle finger to massage his temples.

After a long while, he suddenly let out a sigh and said in Mandarin, "From the looks of it, I won't be able to return any time soon…"

Only the clueless could be fearless. After witnessing such a fascinating event and learning the situation regarding Beyonders and the mysterious world, Zhou Mingrui no longer dared to rashly try the luck enhancement ritual using ancient Feysac or Loen language.

Who knew what other kinds of situations would happen. Perhaps, it would be more bizarre, horrifying, or even a living hell!

At the very least, I should attempt only when I have a deep mastery of mysticism, thought Zhou Mingrui helplessly.

Thankfully, the so-called gathering could provide him with help.

After another bout of silence, he muttered to himself with a tone of dismay, disappointment, agony, and grief, "From this moment forth, I'm Klein."

…

Klein tried his best to refocus his solutions and plans so as to purge the negative emotions in him.

Perhaps, he could learn the potion formula for 'Spectator' from the side…

The 'gathering' that just happened sure is fascinating. People who reside in different places across the world can reduce hundreds of kilometers to just mere inches and discuss face-to-face while supplying each other's needs. Uh, speaking of which, this does sound a little familiar…

Klein was stunned for a few seconds before he burst out in laughter. Pressing against his temple, he jested under his breath, "Wasn't that a social networking platform?"

8: A New Era

Whoosh!

Howling wind accompanied the downpour. The three-mast sailboat was tossed around by the crests and troughs of the incoming waves, as if it was being toyed by a giant.

The crimson glow in Alger Wilson's eyes faded. He found himself still remaining on the deck and nothing appeared to have changed.

Almost immediately, the quirky-shaped glass bottle in his palm shattered and the frost within melted into the rain. In seconds, there were no longer any traces left that suggested the existence of the wondrous antique.

A hexagonal crystal-like snowflake emerged on Alger's palm. It then faded rapidly until it was seemingly absorbed by the flesh, vanishing completely in the process. Alger nodded in a hardly noticeable manner, as if he was thinking about something. He remained still and silent for a full five minutes.

He turned around and headed for the cabin. As he was about to enter, a man who wore a similar robe embroidered with lightning patterns emerged from inside.

This man, who had soft blond hair, paused and looked at Alger. He held his right fist to his chest and said, "May the Storm be with you."

Alger replied with the same words and gesture. There were no emotions on his rough face which had a well-defined structure.

Alger entered the cabin after the greeting and proceeded to the captain's cabin situated at the far end of the corridor.

Surprisingly, he did not encounter any sailors on the way. The whole place was as quiet as a graveyard.

Behind the door to the captain's cabin, a soft brown carpet overlaid the floor. A bookshelf and a wine rack took the opposite side walls of the room. The books with their yellowish covers and wine bottles with their dark red color looked peculiar under the flickering candlelight.

On the desk with the candle, there was a bottle of ink, a quill, a black metallic telescope and a sextant made of brass.

Behind the desk sat a pale middle-aged man wearing a captain's hat which had a skull on it. As Alger approached him, he said menacingly, "I will not give in!"

"I believe you can do it," Alger said calmly, so calm that it felt like he was commenting on the weather.

"You…" The man seemed to be stunned by the unexpected answer.

At this very moment, Alger leaned forward slightly and suddenly dashed across the room until they were only separated by the desk.

Pa!

Alger tightened his shoulder and reached out his right hand to choke the man.

Illusory fish scales appeared on the back of his hand as he crazily mustered more strength to choke the man, giving him no time to respond.

Crack!

Amid the crisp cracking sound, the man's eyes widened as his body was lifted up.

His legs twitched furiously before they soon became motionless. His pupils began to widen as he stared aimlessly. There was a stench from between his legs as his pants gradually turned moist.

While lifting the man, Alger lowered his back and strode toward the wall.

Bang! He used the man as a shield and smashed forward at the wall. His extremely muscular arm was monstrous.

A hole cracked open in the wooden wall, and rain poured in, accompanied by the scent of the ocean.

Alger flung the man out of the cabin, straight into the giant waves that resembled mountains.

The wind continued to howl in the dark as the almighty nature devoured everything.

Alger took out a white handkerchief and wiped his right hand carefully before throwing it into the sea as well.

He stepped back and waited patiently for company.

In less than ten seconds, the blond man from before rushed in and asked, "What happened?"

"The 'captain' has escaped," Alger answered in an annoyed manner as he panted. "I didn't know he still had some of his Beyonder powers."

"Damn it!" the blond man cursed softly.

He went up to the opening and stared into the distance. However, nothing was visible except for the waves and the rain.

"Forget it, he was just extra loot," the blond man said, waving his arm, "We will still be rewarded for finding this ghost ship from the Tudor Era."

Even if he was a Keeper of the Sea, he would not have hastily dived into the sea under this weather condition.

"The 'captain' will not be able to survive much longer if the storm continues." Alger said, as he nodded in approval. The wooden wall was repairing itself at a discernible rate.

He gazed at the wall and turned his head subconsciously towards the rudder and the sail.

He was perfectly aware of what was going on behind all the wooden planks.

The chief mate, the second mate, the crew, and the sailors were not present. There was no living person on board!

Amidst all the emptiness, the rudder and the sail moved eerily by themselves.

Alger again pictured "The Fool" who was covered in grayish-white fog and sighed.

He turned back and looked outside at the mighty waves and spoke as though in a reverie while filled with anticipation and awe, "A new era has begun…"

…

Empress Borough, Backlund, capital of the Loen Kingdom.

Audrey Hall pinched her cheeks in disbelief of her encounter a while ago.

On the dressing table in front of her, the old bronze mirror had shattered into pieces.

Audrey cast her gaze downwards and saw the swirling "crimson" on the back of her hand; it was like a tattoo depicting a star.

The "crimson" gradually faded and disappeared into her skin.

Only at this point in time was Audrey certain that it was not a dream.

Her eyes twinkled as she grinned. She could not help but stand up before bending down to lift up the hem of her dress.

She curtseyed towards thin air and started dancing lively. It was the "Ancient Elf Dance," the most popular dance among royalty at the moment.

She had a bright smile on her face as she moved about gracefully.

Knock! Knock! Someone suddenly knocked at her bedroom door.

"Who is it?" Audrey immediately stopped her dance and asked as she tidied her dress to look more elegant.

"My Lady, may I come in? You should start to prepare for the ceremony," Audrey's maidservant asked from outside the door.

Audrey looked into a mirror on the dressing table and quickly wiped the smile from her face, leaving only a tiny hint of a smile.

She responded gently after she had ensured everything was presentable, "Come in."

The doorknob turned and Annie, her maidservant, pushed in.

"Oh, it cracked…" Annie said as she instantly saw the outcome of the old bronze mirror.

Audrey blinked and said slowly, "Erm, Yes! Susie was here just now. I am sure you know she likes to wreak havoc!"

Susie was a golden retriever that was not so much of a purebred. It was a gift given to her father, Earl Hall, when he bought a foxhound. Nevertheless, Audrey adored it.

"You should train it well," Annie said, as she picked up the pieces of the bronze mirror adeptly and with care, lest it hurt her mistress.

As she finished tidying up, she asked Audrey with a smile, "Which dress do you want to put on?"

Audrey thought for a while and answered," I like the dress designed by Mrs. Guinea for my 17th birthday."

"No, you can't wear the same dress twice to a formal ceremony or others will gossip and question the Hall family's financial ability," Annie said, shaking her head in disagreement.

"But I really like it!" Audrey insisted in a gentle manner.

"You can wear it at home or when you attend an event that isn't so formal," Annie said firmly, suggesting that it was not negotiable.

"Then it will have to be the one with the frilly designs along the sleeves given by Mr. Sades two days ago," Audrey said as she drew in a gasp inconspicuously, maintaining her sweet smile.

"You always have such good taste," Annie said as she stepped back and shouted towards the door, "The sixth dressing room! Ah, forget it, I shall fetch it myself."

Maidservants began to work. The dress, accessories, footwear, hat, makeup, and hairstyle—everything had to be taken care of.

When it was almost ready, Earl Hall appeared at the door wearing a dark brown waistcoat.

He had a hat sharing the same color as his clothes and a nice mustache. His blue eyes were filled with joy, but his loosening muscles, widening waist, and wrinkles were obviously destroying his handsome youth.

"The most dazzling jewel of Backlund, it is time for our departure," Earl Hall said, knocking at the door twice.

"Father! Stop calling me that," Audrey protested as she got up with the help of the maidservants.

"Well then, it's time to set off, my beautiful little princess," Earl Hall said as he bent his left arm, signaling Audrey to hold his arm.

Audrey shook her head slightly and said, "That is for my mother, Mrs. Hall, the Countess."

"Then this side," Earl Hall bent his right arm with a smile and said, "This is for you, my greatest pride."

…

The Imperial naval base, Pritz Harbor, Oak Island.

When Audrey took her father's arm and walked down the carriage,

she was suddenly shocked by the juggernaut in front of her.

In the military port not far away, there was a huge ship shimmering with metallic reflections. It did not have a sail, leaving only an observatory deck, two towering chimneys, and two turrets at the ends of the ship.

It was so majestic and large that the fleet of sails nearby were like newborn dwarfs clustering around a giant.

"Holy Lord of Storms…"

"Oh, m'lord."

"An ironclad warship!"

…

Amidst the furore, Audrey was also shocked by this unprecedented miracle created by mankind. It was an ocean miracle that had never been seen before!

It took a while for the aristocrats, ministers, and Members of Parliament to compose themselves. Then, a black spot on the sky started to grow in size until it occupied a third of the sky and entered everyone's view. The atmosphere suddenly became solemn.

It was a gigantic flying machine with a beautiful streamlined design hovering in mid-air. The deep blue machine had airbags made of cotton which were supported by alloy structures that were strong but light. The alloy structure's bottom had openings mounted with machine guns, projectile launchers, and muzzles. The exaggerated humming noise from the ignition steam engine and the tail blades produced a symphony that left everyone amazed.

The King's family arrived on their airship, exuding a lofty and indisputable authority.

Two swords, each with a ruby crown at the handle, were pointing vertically down and reflected the sunlight on both sides of the cabin. They formed the "Swords of Judgment" emblem which symbolized the Augustus family and had been passed down from the previous

epoch.

Audrey was not yet eighteen, so she had not attended the "introductory ceremony," which was an event led by the Queen that marked one's debut into the Backlund social scene, to announce her adult status. Therefore, she could not be nearer to the airship and had to remain silent at the back to watch the entire event.

Nevertheless, it did not matter to her. In fact, she was relieved that she did not need to deal with the princes.

The 'miracle' that mankind used to conquer the sky touched down gently. The first ones to step down the stairs were the handsome young guards who wore red ceremonial uniforms with white trousers. Decorated with medals, they formed two lines with rifles in hand. They were awaiting the appearances of King George III, his queen, and the prince and princess.

Audrey was not new to meeting important people so she showed no interest at all. Instead, she had her attention on the two statue-like black-armored cavalry flanking the king.

In this era of iron, steam, and cannons, it was surprising that there was still someone who could bear wearing full armor.

The cold metallic luster and the dull black helmet conveyed solemnity and authority.

"Could they be the higher-order Disciplinary Paladins…" Audrey recalled snippets of a casual conversation among adults. She was curious but did not dare go close.

The ceremony commenced with the arrival of the king's family. The incumbent Prime Minister, Lord Aguesid Negan, went up to the front.

He was a member of the Conservative Party and the second non-aristocrat to become the Prime Minister till this very day. He was given the title of a Lord for his great contributions.

Of course, Audrey knew more. The main supporter of the Conservative Party was the present Duke of Negan, Pallas Negan, who was the brother of Aguesid!

Aguesid was a slender and almost bald fifty plus year old man with a sharp gaze. He surveyed the area before speaking.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, I believe you have witnessed this history-making ironclad warship. It has dimensions of 101 by 21 meters. It has an amazing port and starboard design. The armor belt is 457 millimeters thick. The displacement is 10060 tonnes. There are four 305-millimeter main cannons, six rapid-fire cannons, 12 six-pound cannons, 18 six-barrel machine guns, and four torpedo launchers. It can reach a speed of 16 knots!

"It will be the real hegemon! It will conquer the seas!"

The crowd was roused. The mere descriptions were enough to instill fearful images in them, let alone the fact that the actual thing was right in front of them.

Aguesid smiled and spoke a few more lines before saluting the king and requested, "Your Majesty, please give it a name!"

"Since it will set sail from Pritz Harbor, it should be named "The Pritz," George III responded. His expression showed his delight.

"The Pritz!"

"The Pritz!"

…

The words spread from the Navy Minister and the Admiral of the Imperial Navy to all the soldiers and officers on the deck. They all exclaimed in unison, "The Pritz!"

George III ordered the Pritz to set sail for a trial in the midst of the gun salutes and the celebratory atmosphere.

Honk!

Thick smoke spewed out from the chimneys. The sound from the machinery could be heard faintly beneath the sound of the ship horn.

The juggernaut departed from the harbor. Everyone was shocked

when the two main cannons at the ship's bow fired at an uninhabited island in its path.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The ground shook as dust shot up into the sky. Shock waves spread out, producing waves in the sea.

Satisfied, Aguesid turned back to the crowd and announced, "From this day on, doomsday will fall on the seven pirates who call themselves Admirals and the four who call themselves Kings. They can only shiver in fear!

"It is the end of their era. Only the ironclad warship will roam the seas no matter whether the pirates have the powers of the Beyonders, ghost ships, or cursed ships."

Aguesid's chief secretary deliberately asked, "Can't they build their own ironclad warships?"

Some of the nobles and Members of Parliament nodded, feeling that such a possibility could not be eliminated.

Aguesid immediately smiled and shook his head slowly as he answered, "Impossible! It will never be possible! Building our ironclad warship required three big coal and steel amalgamators, a scale of more than twenty steel factories, 60 scientists and senior engineers from the Backlund Cannon Academy and Pritz Nautical Academy, two royal shipyards, almost hundred factories for spare parts, an Admiralty, a ship-building committee, a Cabinet, a determined king with excellent foresight, and a great country with an annual steel production of 12 million tonnes!

"The pirates will never achieve it."

Having said that, he paused and raised his arms before shouting in agitation, "Ladies and gentlemen, the era of cannons and warships has dawned upon us!"

9: The Notebook

After half an hour of rest, Zhou Mingrui, who now viewed himself as Klein, finally recovered. In the meantime, he found that there were now four black dots on the back of his hand, which happened to form a small square.

These four black spots faded and disappeared quickly, but Klein knew that they were still hiding in his body, waiting to be awakened.

"Four spots forming a square; is it in correspondence with the four pieces of staple food at the four corners of the room? Does this mean that in the future, I don't need to prepare the food and can do the ritual and chants immediately?" Klein made a guess.

This might seem good, but the emergence of the spots was ominous, and "things" that one lacked understanding of were always scary.

The fact that those inexplicable Chinese Divinations from Earth could produce effects here, the strange transmigration in his sleep, the mysterious murmurings that almost drove him crazy during the ritual, and the mysterious and trippy gray world whose significance he had no idea of made Klein shiver in the hot weather of June.

"The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest fear is the fear of the unknown." He recalled this saying as he was experiencing the fear of the unknown acutely.

There was in him an unprecedented and irresistible urge to make contact with the mysterious domain, to learn more, and to explore the unknown. There was also a contradicting escape mentality within him compelling him to pretend nothing had happened.

Intense sunlight shone through the window onto the desk, making it appear as if grains of gold were sprinkled on it. Klein gazed at the desk, feeling as though he had come into contact with warmth and hope.

He relaxed slightly, and a strong sense of fatigue washed over him.

His eyelids were as heavy as lead as they kept closing themselves. It must have been the combined effect of the sleepless night and the tiring encounter.

Klein shook his head and pushed himself up with the aid of the desk. He stumbled towards the double-decked bed, completely disregarding the rye bread placed at the four corners of the room. He fell asleep immediately after he lay down.

Groan! Groan!

Klein was woken up by hunger pangs. When he opened his eyes, he felt rejuvenated.

"There's still a slight headache." He rubbed his temples and sat up. He was so hungry that he could eat a horse!

He returned to the desk while straightening his shirt. He picked up the silver vine-leaf pocket watch.

Pa!

The pocket watch's lid sprang open and the second hand was ticking.

Half past twelve. I slept for three hours… Klein put the pocket watch back into his linen shirt pocket while swallowing.

In the Northern Continent, there were 24 hours in a day, 60 minutes in an hour, and 60 seconds in a minute. Whether each second passed at the same rate here compared to Earth was unknown to Klein.

At this moment, he could not even think of terms such as mysticism, rituals or the grayish world. His mind was occupied by one thing—food!

He would leave thinking after his meals! Only then could he work!

Klein picked up the loaves of rye bread from the four corners and wiped off the minute specks of dust on it without any hesitation. He planned on making one of them his lunch.

He decided to dig into the offerings because he only had five pence with him and there was a tradition of eating the offerings back in his hometown. After all, there was not any observable change to the bread. It was better to be frugal.

Of course, the memory and habits left behind by the original Klein had also played a role.

It was a huge waste to use the expensive gas only to light up the room. So, Klein took out a furnace and boiled water with it after adding some coal. He paced around as he waited.

Anyone would choke eating those loaves of rye bread without water.

Yikes. Life with meat only for dinner is going to be dreadful… No, wait, this is already an exception. Melissa would only allow our meals to have meat twice a week if not for my upcoming interview, Klein thought, as he looked around, hungry. He had nothing better to do.

His eyes seemed to turn avaricious when he set his eyes on the pound of mutton in the cupboard.

No, I need to wait for Melissa to eat it together, Klein thought as he shook his head and rejected the idea of cooking half of it right now.

Although he often ate outside, he had still developed some basic culinary skills, owing to his living in a big city alone. His dishes were not delicious, but they were at least edible.

Klein turned his body around so that the mutton would not "seduce" him. Then, he suddenly realized that he had also bought peas and potatoes in the morning.

Potatoes! Klein immediately had an idea. He quickly turned back to the cupboard and took out two potatoes from a tiny pile of them.

He first cleaned the potatoes in the public bathroom and then added them into a pot so they were boiled together with the water.

After a while, he sprinkled into the water some yellow coarse salt from the spices container he found inside the cupboard.

He waited patiently for a few minutes before lifting the pot and pouring the "soup" into a few cups and a bowl. He took out the potatoes with a fork and placed them on the desk at the end.

Ffffffff!

He blew at the potato as he peeled it bit by bit. The fragrance of boiled potato diffused through the air. It smelled very appetizing.

He salivated crazily; the heat could not deter him any longer. Klein took a bite despite having the potato only half peeled.

How fragrant! It had a powdery texture and tasted sweet as he chewed. He was instantly filled with emotions and he wolfed down the two potatoes. He even ate some of the skin.

Then, he held up the bowl and enjoyed the 'soup.' The pinch of salt in water proved to be thirst-quenching.

I really enjoyed eating potatoes this way when I was young… A filled Klein exclaimed in his head. Meanwhile, he tore off a small piece of bread and dipped it into the 'soup' to soften it before eating.

Perhaps the ritual was too tiring; Klein ate two loaves of bread which amounted to a whole pound.

Klein felt he was finally rejuvenated. He enjoyed the joy of life after he drank the 'soup' before tidying up. Then, he took in the lustrous sunshine happily.

He sat back at the desk and began planning.

I can't escape. I must think of a way to come into contact with mysticism and become a Beyonder as mentioned by Justice and The Hanged Man.

I need to overcome the fear of the unknown.

The only way now is to wait for the next 'gathering.' I need to see if I can learn the formula of the 'Spectator' potion or other things related to mysticism.

There are four more days before Monday. Before that, I need to first figure out the problem with Klein. Why did he commit suicide? What happened to him?

Unable to transmigrate back and wash his hands of everything, Klein picked up the notebook that lay on the table. He wanted to find hints that could help him regain his lost memory fragments.

The original Klein obviously had the habit of taking notes. He also liked to write diaries.

Klein was fully aware that the cabinet that supported the desk on the right stored a whole stack of completed notebooks.

The book he had began on the 10th of May. Matters regarding his school, and mentor, as well as content pertaining to knowledge were at the beginning.

"12th May. Mr. Azik mentioned that the common language used by the Balam Empire in the Southern Continent also developed from Ancient Feysac, a branch of Jotun. Why is this so? Does this mean that every sentient living being once spoke the same language? No, there has to be a mistake. According to 'The Revelation of Evernight' and 'The Book of Storms', giants were not the only hegemons of the world in primordial times. There were also elves, mutants, and dragons. Anyways, these are just myths and fantasies."

…

"16th May. Senior Associate Professor Cohen and Mr. Azik discussed the inevitability of the Age of Steam. Mr. Azik opined that it was just a coincidence because if it wasn't for Emperor Roselle, the Northern Continent would still be wielding swords like the Southern Continent. My mentor argued that Mr. Azik had placed too much emphasis on the contribution of an individual. He believes that with progress, even if there wasn't an Emperor Roselle, there would be an Emperor Robert. Therefore, the Age of Steam might come late, but eventually

come nevertheless. I found little meaning in their discussion. I prefer discovering new things and unraveling the hidden past. Perhaps I am more suited to study archeology than history."

…

"29th May. Welch found me and told me that he had acquired a notebook from the Fourth Epoch. Oh my Goddess! A notebook from the Fourth Epoch! He didn't want to ask the archeology department's students for help so he came to Naya and me to help him decode the contents. How can I refuse? Of course, I can only do it after my graduation defense. I can't afford diverting my attention at this stage."

This caught Klein's attention. Compared to the notes about history and viewpoint disagreements, the appearance of a notebook from the Fourth Epoch might have led to Klein's suicide.

The Fourth Epoch was the epoch before the present "Iron Age." Its history was mysterious and incomplete. Due to the fact that very few tombs, ancient cities, and records had been found, archaeologists and historians could only refer to the ambiguous records provided by the seven major Churches that centered around their religious teachings to roughly form the 'original' picture. They knew the existence of the Solomon Empire, the Tudor Dynasty, and the Trunsoest Empire.

Having set his sights on solving the mystery and restoring history, Klein didn't have much interest in the first three eras, whose roots were closer to legends. He was more interested in the Fourth Epoch, also known as the Age of the Gods.

Hmm, so Klein was concerned for his future career and thus focused on the interview. But it was all futile… Klein could not resist exclaiming.

Universities were still very scarce and the majority of students were either from noble or wealthy families. As long as he did not have an extreme mindset, a commoner who had been admitted into university would have been able to build precious social connections through group discussions and networking events despite the prejudice and exclusion from the entrenched social circles.

The very generous Welch McGovern was an example. He was the son of a banker from Constant City, Midseashire, Loen Kingdom. He was used to asking Naya and Klein for help because they were always in the same group for work.

Without thinking further, Klein continued reading the notebook.

"18th June. I have graduated. Farewell, Khoy University!"

"19th June. I have seen the notebook. By comparing sentence structures and root words, I discovered that it is a modified form of ancient Feysac. More precisely, over the course of its thousand-year history, the Feysac language had changed constantly, a little at a time."

"20th June. We have deciphered the contents of the first page. The author was a member of a family called Antigonus."

"21st June. He mentioned the Black Emperor. This is anachronistic with regards to the time this notebook is deduced to be written. Is Professor wrong? Is 'Black Emperor' a common title for every emperor of the Solomon Empire?"

"22nd June. The Antigonus family apparently had a very high standing in the Solomon Empire. The author mentions that he was making a secret transaction with a person named Tudor. Tudor? Is it related to the Tudor Dynasty?"

"23rd June. I am trying to restrain myself from thinking about the notebook and going to Welch's place. I need to prepare for the interview! It's very important!"

"24th June. Naya tells me that they have found something new. I think I need to check it out."

"25th June. From the new deciphered content, the author had accepted a mission to visit the 'Nation of the Evernight' situated at the summit of the highest peak of the Hornacis mountain range. Oh my Goddess! How can a nation exist at the summit of that peak which is over 6000 meters above sea level? How do they survive?"

"26th June. Are these strange things real?"

The record ended at this point. Zhou Mingrui transmigrated in the early hours of the 28th.

Which means to say that there was indeed an entry for June 27th, it's that line… Everyone will die, including me… Klein flipped to the page he first saw when he arrived, feeling goosebumps while he made the deduction.

In order to solve the mystery of the original Klein's suicide, he thought that he should visit Welch and take a look at the ancient notebook. However, with a lot of experience from novels, movies, and TV drama series, he suspected that if they were really related, this visit would be very dangerous—those who went investigating castles despite knowing that they were haunted served as a warning!

However, he had to go since escaping would never solve the problem. It would only make things worse, until it welled over and completely drowned him!

Perhaps call the police? But claiming to have committed suicide would be silly, right…

Knock!

Knock, knock!

There was a series of quick and forceful knocks.

Klein sat straight up and listened.

Knock!

Knock, knock!

The knocks echoed through the empty hallway.

10: The Norm

"Who is it?"

Klein was thinking about the mysterious suicide of the original owner of this body and the unknown danger he might encounter when he heard the sudden knock on the door. He subconsciously opened the drawer, took out the revolver, and asked vigilantly.

The other party was quiet for two seconds before a slightly sharp voice in the Awwa accent replied, "It's me, Mountbatten, Bitsch Mountbatten."

The voice paused for a moment before adding, "The police."

Bitsch Mountbatten… When Klein heard this name, he immediately thought of the owner of this name.

He was the policeman in charge of the street where the apartment was located. He was a rude, brutal, hands-on man. But perhaps, only such a man could be a deterrent for alcoholics, thieves, part-time thieves, villains, and hooligans.

And his unique voice was one of his trademarks.

"Okay, I'll be right there!" Klein responded loudly.

He had planned to put the revolver back into the drawer but thinking that he had no idea why the police were outside and that they might search the room or do other things, he cautiously ran to the stove where the flames had already been extinguished and put the revolver in it.

Then he picked up the coal basket, shook a few pieces into the stove,

covered the gun, and finally placed the kettle over the stove to conceal everything.

After doing all of that, he tidied up his clothes and quickly approached the door and murmured, "Sorry, I just had a nap."

Outside the door stood four policemen in black-and-white checkered uniforms with peak caps. Bitsch Mountbatten, the one with a brown beard, coughed and said to Klein, "These three inspectors have something to ask you."

Inspectors? Klein looked at the shoulder badges of the other three reflexively and found that two of them had three silver hexagons and one had two, both of which looked superior to Bitsch Mountbatten, who had only three chevrons.

As a history student, Klein did little to no research into the ranks of police epaulets, except that Bitsch Mountbatten often boasted of being a senior sergeant.

So these three are inspectors? Influenced by conversations with Benson, Welch, and his classmates, Klein had the common sense to make way and point into the room.

"Please come in. How might I help you?"

The leader of the three inspectors was a middle-aged man with sharp eyes. He seemed to be able to read the mind of a person and make them fearful. His eyes were wrinkled, and the edge of his hat revealed light brown hair. He looked around the room and asked in a deep voice, "Do you know Welch McGovern?"

"What's wrong with him?" Klein quivered and blurted back.

"I'm the one asking the questions." The dignified middle-aged police inspector had a stern look in his eyes.

The inspector next to him, also wearing three silver hexagons, looked at Klein and smiled gently.

"Don't be nervous. It's just a routine questioning."

This policeman was in his thirties, with a straight nose and gray eyes that, like a lake in an ancient forest that no one visited, gave him an indescribable sense of depth.

Klein took a breath and organized his words.

"If you mean Welch McGovern, the graduate of Khoy University from Constant, then I'm sure I know him. We are classmates with the same mentor, Senior Associate Professor Quentin Cohen."

In the Loen Kingdom, "Professor" was not only a professional title, but also a position, just like the combination of professors and department deans on Earth. That meant there could only be one professor in a university's department. If an associate professor wanted to become professor, they had to wait for their superior to retire, or force out their superior with their abilities.

As talents needed to be retained, the kingdom's Higher Education Commission had added senior associate professors in the three-level system of lecturers, associate professors and professors after years of observation. This title was given to anyone with high academic achievements or with enough seniority but did not make it to the position of professor.

At this point, Klein looked into the eyes of the middle-aged police inspector and thought for a second.

"To be honest, our relationship is quite good. During this period, I met with him and Naya frequently to interpret and discuss the Fourth Epoch notebook that belonged to him. Inspectors, did something happen to him?"

Instead of answering, the middle-aged police inspector looked sideways at his gray-eyed colleague.

The inspector with the peak cap and ordinary looks replied mildly, "I'm sorry, Mr. Welch has passed away."

"WHAT?" Despite having some hunches, Klein could not help but shout out in astonishment.

Welch died just like the original owner of this body?

That is a little scary!

"What about Naya?" Klein questioned hurriedly.

"Ms. Naya passed away too," the gray-eyed police inspector said quite calmly. "Both of them died in Mr. Welch's house."

"Killed?" Klein had a vague guess.

Perhaps it was suicide…

The gray-eyed inspector shook his head.

"No, the scene suggests that they committed suicide. Mr. Welch hit the wall with his head many times, covering the wall with blood. Ms. Naya drowned herself in a basin. Yes, the kind used to wash your face."

"That's impossible…" Klein's hairs stood on their ends as he seemed capable of imagining the strange scene.

A girl kneeling on a chair and burying her face into a basin filled with water. Her soft brown hair swaying in the wind, but her entire person remaining motionless. Welch falling to the ground and staring at the ceiling intently. His forehead in a complete blood-mangled mess, while the traces of the impact on the wall were evident with the streaks of blood…

The gray-eyed inspector continued, "We believe so too, but the autopsy results and the situation at the scene exclude factors such as drugs and external forces. They—being Mr. Welch and Ms. Naya—showed no signs of struggling."

Before Klein could speak again, he stepped into the room and asked, pretending to be casual, "When was the last time you saw Mr. Welch or Ms. Naya?"

As he spoke, he gestured with his eyes to his colleague with two silver hexagons.

He was a young police inspector and looked about the same age as Klein. With black sideburns and green pupils, he was good looking and had a poet's romantic temperament.

When he heard the question, Klein thought about it and answered it thoughtfully, "It should be June 26th, we were reading a new chapter in the notes. Then, I went home to prepare for my interview on June 30th. Uh, the interview is for the History Department of Tingen University."

Tingen was known as the city of universities. There were two universities, Tingen and Khoy, as well as technical schools, law colleges and business colleges. It was second only to Backlund, the capital.

As soon as he finished, he saw the young police inspector walk towards his desk in the corner of his eye and pick up the notes which resembled a diary.

Damn! I forgot to hide it!

"Hey!" Klein cried out.

The young inspector smiled back at him, but did not stop flipping through his notes, while the gray-eyed inspector explained, "This is a necessary procedure."

At this time, Bitsch Mountbatten and the dignified middle-aged police inspector were just watching without interrupting or assisting in the search.

Where are your search warrants? Klein had intended to question them, but on second thought, the judicial system of the Loen Kingdom did not seem to have such a thing as search warrants. At least he did not know if there was one. After all, the police force had only been established for fifteen or sixteen years.

When the original owner of this body was still a child, they were still called sheriffs.

Klein couldn't stop it. He watched the young inspector flip through his notes, but the gray-eyed inspector did not ask any questions.

"What is this strange thing?" The young police inspector turned to the end of the notes and suddenly asked, "And what does this mean? 'Everyone will die, including me'…"

Isn't it common sense that everyone dies except for deities? Klein was prepared to quibble, but it suddenly occurred to him that he had planned to "connect" with the police in case of possible danger, but he had no reasons or excuses.

He made a decision in less than a second. Putting his hand over his forehead, he answered painfully, "I have no idea. I really have no idea… When I woke up this morning, I felt I wasn't quite right, as if I had forgotten something. It's especially true for whatever happened recently. I don't even know why I wrote such a sentence."

Sometimes, being frank was the best way to solve a problem. Of course, it required skills. There were things that could be said and could not be said, and the order of what was said first mattered.

As an expert keyboard warrior, Klein was also good at sophistry.

"That is ridiculous! Do you think we are fools?" Bitsch Mountbatten could not help but interject angrily.

This is such a bad lie that it insults the intelligence of his and his colleagues!

It's better for you to pretend to be mentally ill than to pretend to be an amnesiac!

"I'm speaking the truth," Klein responded frankly, looking into the eyes of Mountbatten and the middle-aged police inspector.

It really could not be more true.

"Maybe it is," the gray-eyed police inspector said slowly.

What? He really believed it? Klein was surprised himself.

The gray-eyed inspector smiled at him and said, "An expert will come in two days and believe me, she should be able to help you to recall your lost memories."

Expert? Help me remember my memories? In the field of psychology? Klein frowned.

Hey, what if my memories of Earth were exposed? He suddenly felt like facepalming himself.

The young police inspector put down his notes and searched his desk and room. Fortunately, he focused on books instead of lifting the kettle.

"Well, Mr. Klein, thank you for your cooperation. We advise that you'd better not leave Tingen for the coming days. If you have to, please notify Inspector Mountbatten, or you'll become a fugitive," the gray-eyed police inspector warned.

That's it? That's it for today? No other questions with deeper investigations? Or taking me back to the police station to torture me for information? Klein was at a loss.

Nevertheless, he wanted to solve the odd turn of events brought about by Welch too. So he nodded.

"That wouldn't be an issue."

The inspectors exited the room one by one, and the young man at the end suddenly patted Klein on the shoulder.

"It's really nice. Very lucky."

"What?" Klein's face was puzzled.

The green-eyed police inspector with a poet's temperament smiled and said, "Generally speaking, the norm is for all involved parties in such an event to die. We are very glad and fortunate to see you still alive."

After that, he exited the room and closed the door behind him politely.

The norm is for everyone to die together? Very glad that I'm still alive? Fortunate that I'm still alive?

On this June afternoon, Klein was chilling all over.

11: Real Culinary Skills

The norm is for everyone to die together? Very glad that I'm still alive? Fortunate that I'm still alive?

Klein shivered and quickly ran to the door, trying to catch up with the policemen and ask for protection.

But as soon as he reached the handle, he suddenly stopped.

That officer talked so horribly about it, why didn't they protect me, an important witness or key lead?

Isn't that too careless?

Were they just probing me? Or maybe it's a bait?

All kinds of thoughts rushed into Klein's mind; he suspected that the police were still secretly "watching" him, observing his reaction.

He felt much calmer after thinking of this and was no longer so panicked. He slowly opened the door, deliberately shouting with a trembling voice at the staircase, "You guys will protect me, right?"

Tap, tap, tap…There was no response from the police officers, and there was no change in the rhythm of the contact between the leather shoes and the wooden stairs.

"I know! You'll do that!" Klein shouted again in a tone of feigned conviction, trying to act like a normal person that was in danger.

The sound of footsteps gradually weakened and disappeared into the bottom floor of the apartment.

Klein snorted and laughed. *Isn't that response too fake? Their acting skills are not up to standard!*

He did not run after them. Instead, he turned back to the room and closed the door behind him.

In the next few hours, Klein fully expressed what they called back in the Foodaholic Empire, China—restlessness, nervousness, agitation, inadvertence and murmuring words that he did not understand. He did not slack just because there was no one around.

This is called the self-cultivation of an actor! He laughed at himself in his heart.

When the sun moved to the west, the clouds on the horizon appeared to be reddish-orange. Tenants in the apartment came home one after another; Klein shifted his focus elsewhere.

"Melissa is almost done with school…" He looked at the stove, lifted the kettle, peeled off the coal and took out the revolver.

Without pause or delay, he reached to the back of the board under the double-decked bed where more than ten wooden strips were staggered out.

After clipping the left wheel between a piece of wooden strip and board, Klein straightened up and waited uneasily, fearing that the police would burst open the door and rush into the room with guns in their hands.

If it was an Age of Steam, he was certain he would not be seen by anyone when he did that. However, there were extraordinary powers here, ones that he had proven through his own experiences.

After waiting for a few minutes, there was no movement at the door. There was only the chatter between two tenants who were heading for the Heart of the Wild Bar on Iron Cross Street.

"Phew." Klein exhaled, feeling assured.

All he needed to do was wait for Melissa's return and cook the stewed mutton with tender peas!

When the idea came to Klein's mind, his mouth seemed to taste the rich flavor of the gravy; he remembered how Melissa cooked stewed mutton with tender peas.

First, she boiled the water and stir-fried the meat. Then, she added onions, salt, a little pepper, and water. After a specific period of time, the peas and potatoes were added, and the stew was to be cooked for an additional forty or fifty minutes with the lid on.

"It's indeed a simple and crude way to do it… Supported purely by the flavors of the meat itself!" Klein shook his head.

But there was no other way about it. It was hard for commoners to have many kinds of condiments and various cooking methods. They could only pursue simple, practical, and economical methods. As long as the meat was not burnt or spoiled, anything was good for people who could only eat meat once or twice a week.

Klein was not a very good cook himself and ordered takeout most of the time. But by cooking three or four times a week, after many weeks of accumulated practice, he had a passable standard and felt that he would not let the pound of mutton down.

"When Melissa comes back to cook it, it will be done after 7:30pm. She would be starving by then… It's time for her to see what real cooking is!" Klein made an excuse for himself. First, he started the fire again, went to the bathroom to collect water, and washed the mutton. Then he took out the kitchen boards and knives before chopping the mutton into tiny chunks.

As for the explanation for his sudden culinary skills, he decided to blame it on the dead Welch McGovern, who had not only hired a chef skilled in Midseashire cuisine, but also often created his own delicacies and invited people to try them.

Well, the dead cannot refute me!

Nevertheless, tsk, this is a world with Beyonders; the dead are not necessarily unable to speak. With that in mind, Klein felt a little guilty conscience.

He threw aside his confused thoughts and put the meat into the soup bowl. Then he took out the condiment box and added in a spoonful of the crude salt, half of which had begun yellowing. In addition, he cautiously took some black pepper grains from a special small bottle, mixing and marinating them together.

He placed the saucepan on the stove and, while waiting for it to heat up, Klein rummaged for the carrots from yesterday and cut them into pieces alongside the onions he bought today.

When he was done with his preparations, he took out a small can from the cupboard and opened it. There was not much lard left in it.

Klein took a spoonful, put it in the pan, and melted it. He added in the carrots and onions and stirred it for a while.

As the fragrance began to pervade, Klein poured all the mutton into the pot and fried it with care for a while.

He should have added cooking wine in the process, or red wine at least. However, the Moretti family did not have these luxuries and could only drink a glass of beer a week. Klein had to make do with whatever was available and poured in some boiled water.

After stewing for about twenty minutes, he opened the lid, put the tender peas and cut potatoes in it, and added a cup of hot water and two spoons of salt.

He closed the lid, lowered the fire, and exhaled satisfactorily, waiting for his sister to reach home.

As seconds turned into minutes, the fragrance in the room intensified. There was the allure from the meat, the rich smell of potatoes, and the refreshing scent of onions.

The smell gradually mixed up, and Klein swallowed his saliva from time to time, keeping track of the time with his pocket watch.

After more than forty minutes, some not-so-brisk but rhythmic footsteps approached. A key was inserted, the handle was turned, and the door opened.

Before Melissa came in, she whispered doubtfully, "Smells good…"

With her bag still in her hand, she stepped in and glanced over at the stove.

"You made this?" Melissa took off her veil hat and her hand paused mid-air, looking at Klein in astonishment.

She twitched her nose and inhaled more of the fragrance. Her eyes quickly softened, and she seemed to find some confidence.

"You made this?" she asked again.

"Are you afraid I'd waste the mutton?" Klein smiled and returned with a question. Without waiting for an answer, he said to himself, "Don't worry, I specifically asked Welch to teach me how to cook this dish. You know, he has a good cook."

"First time?" Melissa's eyebrows creased subconsciously, but they were smoothed by the fragrance.

"It looks like I'm talented." Klein laughed. "It's almost done. Put your books and veil hat down somewhere. Go to the bathroom and wash your hands, and then get ready to taste it. I'm very confident about it."

When she heard her brother's orderly arrangements and saw his gentle and calm smile, Melissa stood rooted at the door and failed to respond in her daze.

"Do you prefer the mutton to be cooked longer?" Klein urged with a laugh.

"Ah, okay, okay!" Melissa jolted back to her senses. With a handbag and veil in each hand, she rushed into the room quickly.

When the lid of the saucepan was uncovered, a sudden blast of steam appeared before Klein's eyes. Two pieces of rye bread were already placed to the side of the mutton and tender peas, allowing them to absorb the fragrance and heat to become soft.

By the time Melissa had packed her items, washed her hands and

face, and returned, a plate of stewed mutton with tender peas, potatoes, carrots and onions was already placed on the table. Two pieces of rye bread, colored by a light dip into the gravy, were on their plates.

"Come on, try it." Klein pointed to the wooden fork and spoon next to the plate.

Melissa was still a little confused. She didn't refuse; she picked up a potato with her fork, put it into her mouth and bit it lightly.

The taste of the starchy potato and gravy fragrance flooded her mouth. Her saliva secretion went crazy as she gobbled down the potato in a few mouthfuls.

"Try the mutton." Klein gestured at the plate with his chin.

He had tasted it just now and thought it was barely a pass, but it was enough for a girl who was inexperienced with what the world had to offer. After all, she only ate meat occasionally.

Melissa's eyes were filled with anticipation as she carefully forked some mutton.

It was very tender and, as soon as it entered the mouth, nearly melted. The fragrance of the meat exploded in her mouth, filling it with delicious meat juices.

It was an unprecedented feeling that made Melissa unable to stop eating.

By the time she realized it, she had already eaten several pieces of the mutton.

"I… I… Klein, this was supposed to be prepared for you…" Melissa blushed and stammered.

"I'd nibbled some of the food just now. It's the privilege of being a cook." Klein smiled and soothed his sister. He picked up his fork and spoon. At times, he would eat a piece of meat and sometimes, he would stuff his mouth full of peas. At other times, he would put down the utensils, break off a piece of rye bread and dip it in gravy.

Melissa relaxed and was immersed in the delicacy again by Klein's normal behavior.

"It's really delicious. It doesn't seem like you were doing it for the first time." Melissa looked at the empty dish and praised him with all her heart. Even the gravy was finished.

"It's a long way from Welch's chef. When I'm rich, I'll take you and Benson out to the restaurant and have a better meal!" Klein said. He was beginning to look forward to it himself.

"Your interview… Burp…" Melissa did not finish her words because she suddenly let out a sound of contentment involuntarily.

She put her hand over her mouth in a hurry and looked embarrassed.

The fault is with the stewed mutton with tender peas just now! It was just too delicious.

Klein laughed secretly and decided not to make fun of his sister. He pointed to the plate and said, "This is your mission."

"All right!" Melissa stood up immediately, took the basin and rushed out the door.

When she came back, she opened the cupboard to check the condiment box and other items as per normal.

"Did you just use them?" Melissa was surprised, and turned to Klein, holding the black pepper bottle and lard can.

Klein shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

"Just a little. It's the price of a delicacy."

Melissa's eyes twinkled, her expression changing for a few moments, before she finally said, "Let me cook in the future."

"Um… You have to hurry up and prepare for the interview. You have to think about your job."

12: Here Again

Melissa, can you not rub in it… Klein muttered inwardly. He felt a throbbing pain in his head.

The amount of content Klein had forgotten wasn't considered a lot, but neither was it negligible. The interview was in two days, so how could he find the time to make up for it…?

Furthermore, he was involved in such strange paranormal activity, so how would it be possible that he would be in the mood to revise?

Klein gave his sister a perfunctory response and began putting on the appearance of studying. Melissa moved a chair over to sit beside him. With light shining from the gas lamp, she began working on her assignments.

The atmosphere was serene. When it was almost eleven o'clock, the siblings bade each other goodnight and went to bed.

…

Knock!

Knock! Knock!

Poundings on the door roused Klein from his dreams.

He peered out of the window to see the first glimmer of dawn. In a daze, he flipped over and sat up.

"Who is it?"

Look at the time now! Why didn't Melissa wake me up?

"It's me. Dunn Smith," a man with a deep voice outside the door replied.

Dunn Smith? Don't know him… Klein got off his bed and shook his head as he walked towards the door.

He opened the door to see the gray-eyed police inspector whom he had met the day before standing in front of him.

Alarmed, Klein asked, "Is something wrong?"

The policeman replied with a stern look, "We found a carriage driver. He testified that you had gone to Mr. Welch's place on the 27th—the day when Mr. Welch and Ms. Naya died. Furthermore, Mr. Welch was the one who paid for your transportation fees."

Klein was startled. He did not feel a tinge of fear or guilt that one would expect from having his lies exposed.

It was because he was not even lying. In fact, he was surprised by the evidence provided by Dunn Smith.

On the 27th of June, the former Klein had indeed gone to Mr. Welch's place. On the night that he returned, he killed himself, the exact same way as Welch and Naya did!

Klein gave a forced smile and said, "This is insufficient evidence. It does not directly prove that I am associated with the death of Welch and Naya. Honestly speaking, I'm also very curious about the whole incident. I want to know what exactly happened to my two poor friends. But… But… I really can't remember. In fact I have almost completely forgotten what I had done on the 27th. You may find it hard to believe, but I fully relied on the diaries I had written to roughly make a guess that I had gone to Welch's place on the 27th."

"You sure have great mental fortitude," Dunn Smith said while nodding. He showed not a trace of anger; nor was he smiling.

"You should be able to hear my sincerity," Klein looked him straight in the eye and said.

I'm telling the truth! Of course, only part of it!

Dunn Smith did not give an immediate response. He swept his glance across the room before saying slowly, "Mr. Welch lost a revolver. I guess… I should be able to find it here. Right? Mr. Klein?"

Indeed… Klein finally understood where the revolver had come from. A thought flashed in his mind and he came to the final verdict in an instant.

He raised his hands halfway and retreated, leaving a path open. Then, he signaled at the bunk bed with his chin.

"Behind the bed board."

He did not specifically mention that it was the bottom deck, as no one would normally hide things at the back of the bed board on an upper deck. That would be too obvious for guests to notice at a glance.

Dunn Smith did not move forward. The corners of his mouth twitched as he asked, "Nothing to add on?"

Without hesitation, Klein replied, "There is!"

"Yesterday, when I woke up in the middle of the night, I realized I was lying on my desk with a revolver beside me. There was a bullet at the corner of the room. It was as if I had committed suicide. But due to a lack of experience of never having used a gun, or maybe I was too scared at the final moment… Anyway, the bullet did not achieve the desired result, my head is still in its place. I am still alive now.

"And since then, I have lost some memories, including what I saw and did at Welch's place on the 27th. I'm not lying. I really can't remember."

For the sake of being eliminated as a suspect. For the sake of getting rid of all these strange events surrounding him, Klein explained almost everything that had happened. Except, the transmigration and "gathering."

Also, Klein was careful with his words, allowing every sentence to be amenable. Such as, not revealing the fact that the bullet had hit his

brains, but only mentioning that it did not achieve the desired result, and that his head was still in its place.

To others, these two statements might seem to convey the exact same ideas, but in reality they were like chalk and cheese.

Dunn Smith listened quietly, then said, "This corresponds with what I had surmised. It also corresponds with the hidden logic of similar incidents in the past. Of course, I have no idea how you managed to survive."

"I'm glad you believe in me. I don't know how I survived either." Klein heaved a small sigh of relief.

"But—" Dunn threw out a conjunction. "There is no use in me believing you. You are currently the prime suspect. You have to be confirmed by an 'expert' that you have indeed forgotten what you went through, or that you indeed have nothing to do with the deaths of Mr. Welch and Miss Naya."

He cleared his throat, his expression becoming serious.

"Mr. Klein, I seek your cooperation in coming with me to the police station for the investigation. This should take roughly two to three days if it is confirmed that there are no issues with you."

"The expert is here?" Klein asked blankly in return.

Didn't they say it would take another two days?

"She came earlier than expected." Dunn turned sideways, signaling for Klein to leave.

"Allow me to leave a note," Klein requested.

Benson was still away and Melissa had gone to school. He could only leave a note to inform them that he was involved in an incident associated with Welch so that they would not worry about him.

Dunn nodded, barely minding.

"Alright."

Klein returned to the desk. As he searched for paper, he began thinking about what was about to occur.

Honestly speaking, he did not wish to meet the 'expert.' After all, he had a bigger secret.

In a place where there were seven major Churches, under the premise that Emperor Roselle, who was suspected to be a transmigrator predecessor, was assassinated, a thing like 'transmigration' usually meant having to go to court and enter arbitration!

But, without weapons, combat skills, or superpowers, he was no match for a professional policeman. What's more, a few of Dunn's subordinates were standing in the dark outside.

Once they draw their guns and shoot at me, I'd be finished!

Ugh, I'll take one step at a time. Klein left the note, grabbed his keys, and followed Dunn out the room.

Along the dark aisle, four policemen in black-and-white checkered uniforms split into pairs and guarded them on both sides. They were very alert.

Tap. Tap. Tap. Klein followed alongside Dunn as they went down the wooden stairs which occasionally creaked in protest.

Outside the apartment, there was a four-wheeled carriage. On the side of the carriage, there was the "two crossed swords and a crown" police emblem. Their surroundings were crowded and bustling with noise as usual.

"Go on, up." Dunn signaled for Klein to go first.

Klein was just about to step forward when an oyster seller suddenly grabbed a customer and claimed that he was a thief.

Both parties wrestled and triggered a response from the horses, causing great chaos.

An opportunity!

There wasn't much time for Klein to think any further; he bent forward and dashed towards the crowd.

Either shoving or dodging, he escaped frantically towards the other end of the street.

Right now, for the sake of not "meeting" the expert, he could only proceed by going to the pier outside the city, taking a boat down the Tussock River and escaping to the capital, Backlund. The population was higher there, making it easier to hide.

Of course, he could also get on a steam train, go eastward to the nearest Enmat Harbor and take the sea route to Pritz, then towards Backlund.

Not long after, Klein arrived at a street and made a turn onto Iron Cross Street. There were several carriages that could be hired.

"To the pier outside the city." Klein reached out his hand and hopped onto one of the carriages.

He had thought through things clearly. Firstly, he had to mislead the police that were coming for him. Once the carriage was a suitable distance away from them, he would jump right off!

"Alrighty." The carriage driver tugged at the reins.

Clop! Clop! Clop… The carriage left Iron Cross Street.

Just as Klein was about to jump off the carriage, he noticed that it had turned into another road. It wasn't leading out of the city!

"Where are you going?" Klein blurted in his momentary daze.

"To Welch's place…" the carriage driver answered monotonously.

What!? Klein was at a loss for words. The carriage driver turned around, exposing his cold gray eyes. It was Dunn Smith, the gray-eyed policeman!

"You!" Klein was flustered. Everything suddenly became a blur as though the world spun around him when he instantly sat up.

Sat up? Klein looked around, confused. He noticed the crimson moon outside the window and the room being covered in a crimson veil.

He reached out with his hand to feel his forehead. It was all moist and cold. Cold sweat. His back felt exactly the same.

"It was a nightmare…" Klein heaved a sigh. "All is well… All is well…"

He found it weird. He was rather clear-minded in his dream, he was even able to think calmly!

After calming down, Klein looked at his pocket watch. It was only two in the morning. He got out of bed quietly and planned to head to the washroom where he could wash his face and empty his burgeoning bladder.

He opened the door and walked along the dark corridor. Under the dim moonlight, he walked lightly towards the washroom.

Suddenly, he noticed a silhouette outside the window at the end of the corridor.

That silhouette was wearing a black trench coat that was shorter than a coat, but longer than a jacket.

That silhouette was partly camouflaged in the darkness, bathing in the crimson moonlight.

That silhouette turned around slowly. His eyes deep, gray, and cold.

Dunn Smith!

13: Nighthawk

Plop!

Klein could not help but take a step back. For a moment he was unsure if he was awake or still in his dreams.

The silhouette took off his black top hat and bowed a little as he said with a smile, "Reintroducing myself, Nighthawk, Dunn Smith."

Nighthawk? One of the codenames of the Church of Evernight's Beyonder teams which 'Justice' and 'The Hanged Man' mentioned before? Klein suddenly realised something, and exclaimed after making a connection, "You can control dreams? You just made me dream of that?"

Nighthawk Dunn Smith wore his black hat again, concealing his slightly high hairline. With deep gray eyes, he said, "No, I only entered your dream and provided the necessary guidance."

His voice was deep and soothing; it reverberated through the dimly lit corridor without disturbing the sweet dreams of others, "In dreams, even though much of your usually suppressed emotions and various dark thoughts in you are amplified—making everything seem chaotic, absurd, and crazy—they are all rooted in reality since reality exists. For veterans like me, everything is crystal clear. Compared to a conscious you, I believe the you in your dreams more."

This… What normal human being could control his dream? If I had dreamed of something on Earth, wouldn't Dunn Smith have noticed? Klein was petrified by what had happened in the dream.

Yet he quickly found it bizarre. He remembered being very much

sober and rational—knowing what to say and what not to say.

To put it simply, it did not feel like dreaming at all!

So, Dunn Smith only "saw" what I wanted him to see?

Klein's mind whirled as he gained a glimmer of understanding.

This is a perk that resulted from transmigration? Like having a special body and soul? Or was it the effects of that luck enhancement ritual?

"So, Mr Smith, do you believe that I really lost my memory?" Klein organized his thoughts and asked in reply.

Dunn Smith did not answer him directly. Instead he looked at him keenly.

"You are actually not surprised by the course of events?"

"I've met people who wouldn't believe in the power of the Beyonders, and they would rather believe that they haven't really woken up."

Klein tersely acknowledged as he said, "Perhaps, I have always been praying, hoping that there was such power to help me."

"An interesting train of thought… Perhaps you survived not only because you were lucky." Dunn nodded expressionlessly. "I can now confirm that you really lost parts of your memories due to the incident, especially those related to it."

"So can I go back now?" Klein heaved a long sigh of relief in his heart as he probed.

Dunn placed a hand in his pocket and walked slowly towards Klein, the surrounding darkness becoming tranquil and gentle.

"No, you still have to come with me to see the expert," he smiled politely and said.

"Why?" Klein blurted out, then added, "You don't believe in the findings from my dream?"

You must be joking, if that "expert" specializes in hypnosis or mind-reading and stuff, then wouldn't my biggest secret be exposed?

The consequences would be beyond imagination!

"I'm quite humble usually, but I'm still confident for things related to dreams." Dunn calmly replied, "However, for important key matters, there is no harm in confirming them again. Plus, our specialties lie in different areas. Perhaps, she can help you recover some of your memories."

Not waiting for Klein to reply, his voice turned deeper. "After all you're connected to the whereabouts of that Antigonus family notebook."

"What?" Klein froze.

Dunn stopped in front of him, locking his gray eyes on Klein's eyes and said, "At the scene of the suicide, there was not a single trace of that notebook from the Fourth Epoch. Welch is dead, Naya is dead; you are our only lead."

"…Alright then." Klein went silent for a moment before exhaling.

A missing notebook… now this is really peculiar!

How did I not think about the whereabouts of that notebook from the Fourth Epoch!

Dunn nodded slightly, walking past Klein and said, "Lock your door and come with me to Welch's residence, the expert is waiting for us there."

Klein took in a silent breath. His heart was thumping wildly as he felt uneasy.

He wanted to decline and even had the intention to run. However, he believed that with what had happened in his dreams, Dunn Smith would have definitely heightened his level of guard. And with the difference in strength between a normal human and a Beyonder, there was little chance of success by using force.

He must have a revolver with him too… He must also have had practice using the revolver…

Many thoughts flashed past his mind, and eventually Klein chose to accept the reality.

"Alright."

Sigh, I can only take one step at a time and see how things unfold; maybe, that miraculous power in my dream will take effect again…

"Then let's go," Dunn said in an indifferent tone.

Klein turned and followed. After taking two steps, he suddenly stopped and said, "Mr. Smith, I… I would like to use the bathroom first."

I came out originally for the bathroom…

Dunn did not stop him. Instead, he gave him a keen look and said, "No problem, Klein. Believe me, I am far more powerful than you can imagine in the dark night."

In the dark night… Klein silently repeated this phrase.

He did not make any reckless attempt to escape and honestly relieved himself. He then washed his face with cold water, completely calming himself down.

Klein changed his outfit and closed the door to his apartment. With gentle steps, Klein followed Dunn down the stairs and walked towards the building's entrance.

In such a tranquil setting, Dunn Smith opened his mouth and spoke suddenly, "At the end of the dream, why did you try to escape? What were you afraid of?"

Klein immediately thought of an answer as he said, "I do not remember what I did at Welch's place, nor do I remember if I was directly involved in Welch's and Naya's deaths. I was afraid that if it was really proven to be my doing, I would rather gamble and escape. I can then start anew in the Southern Continent."

"I would've done the same if I were you," Dunn said as he pushed open the door to the building, letting in the cool midnight breeze to disperse the sweltering heat inside.

He was not afraid of Klein running away as he got on the carriage. It was exactly the one Klein had dreamed of—a four-wheeled carriage drawn by a single horse and the carriage driver. There was also the police emblem of double-crossed swords that clustered a crown carved onto the side of the carriage.

Klein followed into the carriage. Inside, there was a thick carpet laid out and the place was filled with a soothing fragrance.

Having sat down, he looked for a topic to probe for more information.

"Mr. Smith, what if—and I mean if—the 'expert' confirms that I have really forgotten a part of my memories? And that there is no other evidence which points to me being the perpetrator or a victim, would this be over?"

"In theory, yes. We will try to search for the notebook through other means. As long as it exists, it can be found. Of course, before that, we will have to make sure you are not cursed or have any scent of cacodemons and that there are no related psychological problems lingering. We must ensure that you can embrace the rest of your life peacefully and healthily." Dunn Smith had a smile on his face, a rather unusual smile.

Klein caught on to this point keenly, and promptly inquired, "In theory?"

"Yes, only in theory. In this field of work, there are always twisted, unorthodox, and inexplicable things happening." Dunn looked Klein in the eye and said, "Their continuation or end are not what we can foresee or control at times."

"For example?" Klein actually felt frightened for a moment.

The carriage sped through an almost empty street. Dunn took out his tobacco pipe and sniffed it, saying, "When we believe that things

have come to an end, with everything going back to normal, it would resurface in a terrifying, chilling way."

"A few years ago, we handled a case regarding an evil cult. They did live sacrifices to please an evil god by making followers commit suicide. When one of the followers was chosen, his survival instincts triumphed over his foolishness, twisted beliefs, and psychedelic drugs. He secretly escaped and reported to the police.

"The case was handed over to us. It was a very small mission, since there were no Beyonders in that cult. The deity they worshiped was actually randomly thought up by their leader merely for the sake of money and satisfaction. Humanity was lost there.

"We only used two members, coupled with the support from the police, to suppress this cult. No one was off the hook. For that whistleblower, we also confirmed that he had no lingering demonic scent left on him. He was not cursed and did not suffer any mental disorders. He didn't have any personality problems or any other irregularities, nothing.

"Later, he got a decent advancement in his career, got married to a very good wife, had a son and a daughter. His dark past seemed far away from him. The horror and bloodshed seemed to have completely vanished."

At this point, Dunn Smith gave out a laugh and said, "Yet in March this year, despite being in good financial health and having a loving wife and adorable kids… he strangled himself to death in his own office."

The crimson moonlight outside the carriage window shone upon Dunn Smith.

At that instance, his seemingly self-derisive smile made Klein feel unspeakably horrified.

"Strangled himself to death…" Klein drew in a gasp of cool air silently, as if seeing his own tragic end.

Even if I escaped it once, it might just be temporary?

Is there any way to resolve this completely?

Become a Beyonder to fight it?

The carriage returned to silence. Countless thoughts welled in Klein's mind.

Under an awkward silence, the carriage traveled for a long time at high speeds.

Just as Klein made up his mind to consult Dunn Smith for any solutions, the carriage came to a halt.

"Mr. Smith, we have reached Welch's residence." The carriage driver's voice was heard.

"Let's get down." Dunn straightened out his black trench coat that reached his knees.

"Oh, let me introduce beforehand, the official disguise of the 'expert' is the most renowned spirit medium of Awwa County."

Klein suppressed his other thoughts and asked curiously, "Then what is her actual identity?"

Dunn half-turned his body and turned his head back, with his abstruse gray eyes he said, "A true Spirit Medium."

14: The Medium

A true medium… Klein repeated this description inwardly, and did not speak again. He followed Dunn Smith down the carriage.

Welch's place in Tingen was a detached house with a garden. The road outside the hollowed metal gates allowed four carriages to pass through at once. Street lamps lined the sides of the road every fifty meters. They looked different from the ones Klein had seen in his previous life. They were gas lamps and the height of every lamp was about that of an adult male so that it was convenient to light the lamps.

The black metal was closely appressed to the glass, forming a checkered pattern, casting out classical paper lantern-like 'artworks.' Coldness and warmth were intertwined while darkness and light coexisted.

Walking along the pathway blanketed by the dim yellow light, Klein and Dunn Smith entered Welch's rented place through the ajar metal gate.

Facing the main entrance was a cemented road that led straight to a two-floored house. Two carriages could go at once.

There was a garden on the left and a lawn to the right. The pleasantly faint fragrance from the flowers mixed with the cool scent of the fresh grass made one feel happy and relaxed.

As soon as he stepped in, Klein shivered and peered around.

He felt that in the garden, somewhere in the lawn, on the roof, behind the swing, somewhere in a dark corner, pairs of eyes were

observing him!

There was clearly no one here; yet, Klein felt as if he was on a crowded street.

This strange contrast—this peculiar feeling—tensed him up. A chill ran up his spine.

"Something's wrong!" he couldn't help but exclaim to Dunn.

Dunn's expression remained unchanged as he walked beside him and replied calmly, "Just ignore them."

Since the "Nighthawk" had said so, Klein tolerated the chilling feeling of not being able to notice the perpetrator despite being followed, spied, and observed. Step by step, he arrived at the main entrance of the house.

If this goes on any longer, I will go crazy… As Dunn reached out his hand to knock on the door, Klein quickly turned around. Flowers swayed in the wind, without a person in sight.

"Come in, gentlemen." A seemingly ethereal voice came from inside the house.

Dunn turned the doorknob, pushed the door open and said to a woman on the sofa, "Daly, any results?"

The chandelier in the living room was unlit. A set of two leather couches surrounded a marble coffee table.

On the table was a lit candle, but the light emitted a cobalt blue glow. It covered the half-enclosed living room, dining room, and kitchen in a strange, eerie hue.

In the middle of the sofa sat a lady in a hooded black robe who wore blue eyeshadow and blush. An exposed silver bracelet with a hanging white crystal pendant was worn around her wrist.

At the first sight of her, Klein had an inexplicable feeling. She was dressed just like a real medium…

Is she stereotyping herself?

Daly, the "medium" with uncanny beauty, took a quick glance at Klein with her twinkling emerald eyes. She looked at Dunn Smith and said, "The original spirits have all disappeared, including that of Welch's and Naya's. Right now, all these little rascals know nothing at all."

Spirits? Spirit Medium… All the invisible things that were spying on me previously were spirits? There were so many of them? Klein removed his hat and placed it across his chest, bowing slightly as he said, "Good evening, Madam."

Dunn Smith sighed. "That's tricky…"

"Daly, this is Klein Moretti. See if you can get anything out of him."

The medium, Daly, shifted her gaze onto Klein immediately. She pointed at a single armchair and said, "Please, take a seat."

"Thank you." Klein nodded, took a few steps over, and sat down obediently. His heart raced uncontrollably.

Whether I survive, whether I get through this successfully or have my secrets exposed will all depend on whatever happens next!

And the thing that made him feel the most helpless was that he had nothing to rely on. He could only place his hopes on his inherent specialness…

This feeling really sucks… Klein thought bitterly.

Next, Dunn sat on the two-seater sofa opposite of Klein. Daly took out two thumb-sized glass bottles from her waist pouch.

Her emerald eyes smiled at Klein as she said, "I need a bit of help here. After all, you are not an enemy, and I can't treat you harshly. That might make you uncomfortable or put you in pain. It might even leave some serious after-effects on you. I will give you some fragrances, making you feel tender and smooth, which will allow you to let loose bit by bit so that you can truly indulge in those feelings."

That sounded wrong… Klein gaped as his eyes were filled with shock.

Seated across him, Dunn laughed and said, "Don't be weirded out. We are different from the fellows from the Church of Storms. Here, the ladies can also verbally tease men. In this regard, you should be able to understand. Your mother was a devout believer of the Goddess. You and your brother used to attend Sunday school at Church."

"I understand. It's just that I never thought that she would be such a… such a…" Klein gestured, as he could not find the right words. He almost blurted out the direct translation for "veteran driver[1]".

Dunn curved the corners of his mouth up and said, "Don't worry. Actually, Daly seldom does this. She just wants to use these methods to calm you down. She prefers corpses over men."

"You make me sound perverted," Daly interjected with a smile.

She opened one of the little bottles and dripped a few drops onto the bright blue candle flame.

"Night vanilla, slumber flower, and chamomile, all distilled and extracted to form this aromatic floral essence. I call it 'Amantha;' it means tranquility in the Hermes language. It smells really amazing."

As they chatted, the candle flame flickered, evaporating the floral essence and filling the room with its aroma.

A beautifully enchanting aroma found its way into Klein's nostrils. He no longer felt tense. He was instantly calm as if he was gazing into the darkness of the silent night.

"This bottle is called the Eye of the Spirit. Barks and leaves of drago and poplar trees are sun-dried for seven days and decocted thrice. Then, they are immersed in Lanti. Of course, there would be several incantations while we're at it…" As Daly described the liquid, the amber substance dripped onto the cobalt blue candle flame.

Upon smelling the ethereal scent of the aromatic wine, Klein noticed that the candle flame was dancing wildly. The luster of Daly's blue eyeshadow and blush shone oddly, to the extent of him seeing double.

"It is a great helping hand for mediumship. It is also a floral essence that is sufficiently enchanting… "

As Daly explained continuously, Klein felt as if her voice was coming from all around.

Bewildered, Klein looked around and realized that everything was swaying and in a blur. He felt like he was shrouded by layers and layers of fog. Even his body was swaying as it phased away before he began floating and then losing his balance.

Colors blended like an impressionist painting—the reds were redder, the blues were bluer, and the blacks were blacker—appearing more defined than usual. It was dreamy and hazy. Distinct murmurs from the surroundings came through as if hundreds and thousands of people who could not be seen were debating.

This feels similar to the luck enhancement ritual I did before, but without the kind of madness that makes your head feel like exploding… Klein looked around and thought questioningly.

At this moment, his vision was locked onto a pair of eyes that were crystal clear like emerald. On a blurry "sofa" sat Daly in a black robe. Eccentrically, her gaze concentrated on the tip of Klein's head. She smiled and in a gentle voice, said, "Let me properly introduce myself. I am the Spirit Medium, Daly."

I can still… have rational thoughts… It's like when I was at that luck enhancement ritual and that gathering… The thought crossed Klein's mind as he intentionally behaved muddled and said, "Hello there…"

"The mental worlds of humans are extremely vast. Many secrets are hidden within the mind. Look at the ocean—what we know about it is all on the superficial level. But in reality, deep in the ocean, there is a larger unseen portion. Other than islands, there is the entire ocean. There is the boundless sky that symbolizes the spiritual world…

"You are the spirit of your body. Not only do you know of the islands above, but you also know of the things hidden beneath the sea, as well as the entire ocean…

"Anything that exists leaves some traces behind. The superficial memories of the islands may be wiped out, but what is left under the sea and the entire ocean will definitely have a corresponding projection left in it…"

Daly went on and on, bewitching Klein. The vague surrounding winds and shadows took on similar forms. It was as though Klein's spirit was fully exposed in the form of an ocean, waiting for him to search and discover.

Klein watched patiently, as he 'churned' the ocean occasionally. Then, in an airy voice, he replied, "No… I can't remember… I have forgotten…"

He expressed his agony at just the right level.

Daly tried to guide him once again, but the clear-headed Klein was unaffected.

"Okay. We shall end here. You may leave."

"Leave."

"Leave…"

The airy voice lingered and Daly disappeared. The wind and shadows began calming as the ethereal smell and subtle scent of the aromatic wine became more distinct again.

The colors returned to their normal state and the fuzzy feeling was no longer around. Klein's body quivered, and he found his balance again.

He opened his eyes, which he had no memory of closing, and noticed that the candle with the bright blue flame was still before him. Dunn Smith was still resting comfortably on the couch. Same for Daly with the black-hooded robe.

"Why did you use the theory that belongs to that bunch of evil madmen, the Psychology Alchemists?" Dunn furrowed his eyebrows and stared at Daly.

As Daly put away the two little bottles, she replied calmly, "I think

it's pretty accurate. At least, it corresponds with some of the things I've made contact with before…"

Without waiting for Dunn's reply, Daly shrugged and said, "This tricky fellow did not leave a single trace behind."

Upon hearing this, Klein heaved a huge sigh of relief. Pretentiously, he asked, "Oh, it's over? What happened? It felt like I just took a nap…"

That was a pass, right?

Thankfully, I had the 'luck enhancement ritual' as a rehearsal!

"Just take it as such." Dunn interrupted him and looked at Daly. "Have you examined Welch's and Naya's bodies?"

"The corpses can tell us a lot more than you can imagine. It's such a pity that Welch and Naya had indeed committed suicide. So, the force that drove them to it is to be feared. Not a single trace was left behind." Daly stood up and pointed at the candle. "I need some rest."

The cobalt blue glow vanished, and the house was instantly inundated with a blurry shade of crimson.

…

"Congratulations. You can return home now. But do remember; do not reveal this incident to your loved ones. You have to promise this," Dunn said as he led Klein to the door.

Surprised, Klein asked, "Is there no need to examine the curses or the trails left behind by the evil spirits?"

"Daly didn't mention anything about it, so there's no need for it," Dunn answered simply.

Klein calmed down. As the thought of his previous worries came to mind, he asked hurriedly, "How can I be sure that I will be free from trouble from now on?"

"No worries." Dunn twitched his lips and said, "Based on statistics of

similar incidents in the past, eighty percent of the survivors of an incident do not experience any horrifying after-effects. Yeah… This is based on what I know… roughly… more or less…"

"Then… there's still one fifth of those poor souls…" Klein did not dare to try his luck.

"Then you can consider joining us as a civilian staff. This way, even if there are any precursors, we can discover it in time," Dunn said casually as he approached the carriage. "Or simply become a Beyonder. After all, we are not nannies. We can't babysit you all day long, even having to watch what you do with women."

"Can I?" Klein questioned the statement.

Of course, he did not expect much. After all, how was it even possible to be a part of the Nighthawks so easily and obtain the power of the Beyonders?

That was the power of the Beyonders!

Dunn paused, and turned his head sideways to look at him.

"It's not that you can't… It depends…"

What? The transition in his words shocked Klein. Klein stared blankly beside the carriage before answering, "Really?"

Who are you kidding? Is it so easy to become a Beyonder?

Dunn laughed lightly; his gray eyes were hidden in the shadow of the carriage.

"You don't believe me, huh? Actually, when you become a Nighthawk you lose a lot. For instance, freedom.

"Even if we don't talk about this now, there is another issue. Firstly, you are not a member of the clergy, nor a devotee. You can't pick whatever you want or choose the safest approach."

"And secondly…" Dunn held onto the handle and hopped onto the carriage as he went on. "Among the cases that we—us, the Mandated

Punishers, the Machinery Hivemind and other Judiciaries—have to deal with annually, a quarter of them were a result of Beyonders who lost control."

A quarter… Beyonders who lost control… Klein was dumbfounded.

Just then, Dunn turned slightly. His gray eyes were deep. With no sign of a smile, he continued, "And among the quarter of cases, a large number of them are our teammates."

1. Veteran driver is an Internet slang phrase describing people who are very experienced in particular domains, especially sexually-related things such as posting pornographic resources.

15: The Invitation

A wave of tumultuous emotions rose up in Klein's heart after he heard Dunn. Instinctively, he uttered, "Why?"

Beyonders have serious hidden dangers? So much so that the Church's internal judiciary and the Beyonders, who deal with bizarre phenomena, are also prone to problems?

Dunn stepped into the carriage and sat back in his seat. His expression and tone remained the same.

"This is not something that you need to understand. Neither is it something you can understand, unless you become one of us."

Klein was struck dumb for a moment, after which he sat down and questioned in a tone that was half dubious and half-joking.

"If I don't come to understand, how is it possible for me to make a decision to join?"

And not joining would mean Klein could not understand. This would end in a deadlock…

Dunn Smith took out the pipe once again, placed it against his nose, and took a whiff.

"You probably misunderstood; a civilian staff member is also one of us."

"In other words, as long as I become one of your civilian staff members, I will be able to understand the relevant secrets, figure out the hidden dangers that plague Beyonders, and the dangers that may be encountered, as well as consider whether I want to become a

Beyonder later?" Klein reorganized his thoughts and paraphrased what Dunn had shared.

Dunn smiled and said, "Yes, that is the case, except for one point. You cannot simply become a Beyonder just because you want to because every Church will be equally strict in this aspect."

It would be odd if the Churches were not strict… Klein lampooned silently, as he added with a more intense tone coupled with stronger body language, "What about civilian staff members? This should be quite strict as well, right?"

"There shouldn't be any problems if it's you," said Dunn with half-closed eyelids as he whiffed the pipe with partially relaxed countenance. However, he did not ignite it.

"Why?" Klein asked as he was once again grappled by doubt.

At the same time, he jested inwardly.

So my uniqueness and halo as a transmigrator are akin to the fireflies in the night, ever so bright and outstanding?

Dunn opened his half-closed eyelids, his gray eyes reflecting the same tranquility as before.

"First, you managed to survive without our help in such a situation. Certain exceptional qualities are not present in others. For instance, luck. Lucky people are often welcomed."

Seeing that Klein's expression had turned blank, Dunn smiled slightly.

"Alright, just treat this as a humorous statement. Second, you're a graduate of the history department from Khoy University; this is something we urgently need. Although a believer of the Lord of the Storms, Leumi perceives women in a way that is loathsome, but his views regarding society, humanities, economics, and politics remain incisive. He said before that talents are key to maintaining a competitive advantage and positive development, a point that I very much agree with."

Noticing that Klein was slightly furrowing his eyebrows, Dunn

casually explained, "You should be able to imagine that we often encounter documents and objects from the Fourth Epoch or earlier. Many cults and heretics have tried to gain power from these things. Sometimes, they themselves can lead to strange and terrible things.

"Except for the Beyonders in special fields, most of us are not good with our studies, or have passed that age." Having said that, Dunn Smith pointed to his own head, and the corner of his mouth turned up slightly as if he was mocking himself.

He then said, "Those dry, boring knowledge always puts us to sleep. Even the Sleepless can't help it. In the past, we would cooperate with historians or archaeologists, but this posed the risk of exposing secrets, and mishaps might befall on these otherwise uninvolved professors and associate professors. Thus, the addition of a professional in our ranks is hard to refuse."

Klein nodded lightly and accepted Dunn's explanation. With his thoughts all over the place, he asked, "Then why don't you directly, um, groom one?"

Dunn continued, "This brings me to the third point, which is also the final and most important point. You've already been through a similar ordeal, so inviting you doesn't violate the confidentiality clause.

"With regard to developing others, I will bear the responsibility of exposure if it fails. Most of our team members, our civilian staff members, come from within the Church."

After Klein finished listening silently, he asked curiously, "Why are you so strict about maintaining confidentiality? Wouldn't spreading the news publicly to more people and increasing awareness lessen the chances of a similar mistake from happening again? The greatest fear stems from the fear of the unknown; we can make the unknown become known."

"No, humanity's stupidity is beyond your imagination. It actually leads to more people emulating these acts, creating more chaos and more severe incidents," Dunn Smith shook his head and replied.

Klein acknowledged as he replied in enlightenment, "The only lesson that humans can learn from history is that humans do not gain any lessons from history, and they're always repeating the same tragedies."

"That famous quote from Emperor Roselle is indeed filled with much philosophical meaning," agreed Dunn.

…Emperor Roselle said that? This transmigration senior really did not give the 'latecomers' any chance to posture… Klein did not know how to follow up on Dunn's words.

Dunn turned his head and gazed out of the horse carriage. The dim yellowish light of the street lamps intertwined to display the splendor of civilization.

"…There is a similar discourse within the judiciary of the major Churches. This may be the main reason for the strict confidentiality and the prohibition of ordinary people from knowing."

"What is it?" Klein asked as his interest was piqued, pleased that he seemed to be prying into secrets.

Dunn turned his head; his facial muscles pulled themselves so slightly that it was hardly visible.

"Faith and fear bring troubles. More faith and more fear bring more troubles, until everything is destroyed."

After he said that, Dunn signed, "Besides praying for the blessings and help from gods, humans can't solve their real major problems.

"Faith and fear bring troubles. More faith and more fear bring more troubles…" Klein recited silently, but he could not fully understand it.

What followed next was the fear of uncertainty that came from the unknown. It was like the dark shadows formed by the street lights outside. In the darkness without light, it appeared as though there were pairs of callous-looking eyes and wide-opened mouths.

As the horse galloped vigorously and nimbly while the wheels of the horse carriage reeled on ahead with Iron Cross Street in sight, Dunn

broke the silence suddenly and formally invited Klein.

"Would you like to join us as a civilian staff member?"

In Klein's mind, multiple thoughts surfaced, making him indecisive. He contemplated and asked, "Can I have some time to consider?"

Since this matter had serious implications, he could not hastily and recklessly make the decision.

"No problem, just give me a reply before Sunday," Dunn nodded and added. "Of course, remember to keep this a secret and don't disclose the information regarding Welch to anyone, including your brother and sister. Once this is violated, it'll not only bring them trouble, but you might also have to attend a special court."

"Okay," Klein answered gravely.

The carriage was once again plunged into silence.

Seeing that they were nearing Iron Cross Street and that he was almost reaching home, Klein suddenly thought of a question. He hesitated for a few seconds before asking, "Mr. Smith, what kind of salary and benefits do civilian staff get?"

This was a serious question…

Taken aback momentarily, Dunn smiled instantly and answered, "There's no need for you to worry about this issue. Our funds are guaranteed by the Church and the police department. For newly registered civilian staff, the weekly salaries are placed at two pounds and ten soli. There is an additional ten soli as compensation for the risk and confidentiality. All of this will add up to a total of three pounds. This is hardly worse than a confirmed university lecturer.

"After which, your salary will gradually rise according to your experience and contributions.

"As for civilian staff members, the contract is generally five years. After five years, you can quit normally if you're no longer willing to stay. You only have to sign a lifetime confidentiality agreement and you're not allowed to leave Tingen until permission is given. If you

want to move to another city, the first thing you must do is register with the local Nighthawks.

"By the way, there are no weekends and you can only work in shifts. At any point in time, there should be three civilian staff on duty and if you wish to go to the South or Desi Bay for a vacation, you'll need to arrange it with your colleagues."

Just as Dunn finished speaking, the horse carriage pulled to a stop and the apartment building where Klein and his siblings resided appeared on the side.

"I get it now," Klein turned around and walked down the horse carriage. He stopped at the side and asked, "By the way Mr. Smith, where do I find you after I've come to my decision?"

Dunn gave a deep and low throaty laugh before saying, "Go to the 'Hound Pub' at Besik Street and find their boss, Wright. Tell him that you want to hire a small mercenary squad for a mission."

"Huh?" Klein asked in confusion.

"Our location is confidential too. Before you agree to become one of us, I can't tell you directly. Alright Mr. Klein Moretti, I wish you a good dream tonight as well," Dunn smiled as he said.

Klein took off his hat and saluted, watching as the pace of the departing horse carriage gradually sped up.

He took out his pocket watch.

Click! He pressed it open and saw that it was only a little past four in the morning. The street was filled with a relaxing, cool breeze. Dim yellowish light from the street lamps illuminated the surroundings.

Klein drew a deep breath and took in the deep silence of the night around him.

The busiest and noisiest district in the day could be so lifeless and quiet at night. This was in stark contrast to the silent observations and medium's seance in Welch's residence.

It was only then that Klein realized that the back of his linen shirt was unknowingly drenched in sweat, cold and clammy.

16: Rat-Baiting With Dogs

Phew, I finally got through the round with the medium…

Klein let out a foul breath. He slowly turned around and enjoyed the cool breeze and tranquility of the night while walking closer and closer to the apartment building's door.

He took out his keys, inserted the correct one in and turned it gently, allowing the crimson-mixed darkness to expand with the creaking sound of the opened door.

Walking on the staircase without a single person in sight and taking in the cold air, Klein had an inexplicable and amazing feeling. It felt like he had a few more hours than others. This caused him to hasten his pace.

In a similar state of mind, he opened the door to his room and before he even stepped inside, he saw a silhouette sitting silently in front of his desk. It had reddish black hair, bright brown eyes, and a delicate, pretty face. Undoubtedly, she was Melissa Moretti!

"Klein, where did you go?" Melissa asked curiously as she relaxed her eyebrows.

Without waiting for Klein's reply, she added, "Just now, I got up to go to the bathroom and realized you weren't home." It was as if she wanted to know everything clearly, from the causes and effects of the matter to the underlying logic.

With great experience at lying to his parents, Klein's brain took a spin before he gave a bitter smile and calmly replied, "I couldn't fall asleep again after I woke up. Instead of wasting time, I decided that I should

train my body. So I went out to run a few rounds. Look at my sweat!"

He took off his jacket and half-turned his body, pointing to his back.

Melissa stood up, took a glance half-heartedly and deliberated for a few moments before saying, "Honestly speaking, Klein, you don't have to stress yourself out. I'm sure you can pass the interview to Tingen University. Even if you can't, er—I mean *if*—you can still find better ones."

I haven't even thought about the interview… Klein nodded and said, "I understand."

He did not mention the "offer" that he had gotten because he had not decided whether he wanted to join them or not.

Staring at Klein intensely, Melissa suddenly turned around and trotted into the interior of the house. She took out an object that resembled a tortoise. It consisted of items like gears, rusted iron, torsion springs and ordinary springs.

After quickly tightening the torsion spring, Melissa placed the object on the desk.

Ka! Ka! Ka!

Dum! Dum! Dum!

The "tortoise" moved and jumped with a rhythm that could pull anyone's attention.

"Whenever I feel irritated, I feel much better seeing it move. I've been doing this very often recently and it's very effective! Klein, give it a try!" invited Melissa as her eyes brightened.

Klein did not turn down his sister's goodwill. He approached the "tortoise" and waited for it to stop before laughing. He said, "Simplicity and regularity can indeed help relaxation."

Without waiting for Melissa's reply, Klein pointed to the "tortoise" and casually asked, "Did you make this yourself? When did you make this? Why wasn't I aware of it?"

"I made use of unwanted materials from school and picked up things from the streets to make this. It was only finished two days ago," Melissa said in her usual tone, the side of her lips upturned a few more degrees.

"That's impressive," Klein praised sincerely.

As a boy with poor skills in machine assembly, he encountered great difficulties even assembling a four-wheeled toy car as a child.

With her chin slightly raised and her eyes slightly bent, Melissa calmly replied, "It was okay."

"Being overly humble is a bad trait," Klein smiled slightly and continued, "This is a tortoise, right?"

Instantly, the atmosphere in the room took a great plunge, leaving behind an air of graveness for a while. Then, Melissa faintly replied with a voice that seemed enigmatic like the crimson veil, "It's a puppet."

Puppet…

Klein gave an awkward smile, and tried to forcefully explain, "The problem lies in the materials, they're too rudimentary."

Following that, he tried to change the topic and said, "Why would you go to the bathroom in the middle of the night? Isn't there a toilet here? Don't you always sleep till dawn?"

Melissa was taken aback momentarily.

It was only after a few seconds, before she opened her mouth, prepared to explain.

At that moment, an intense sound of digestion sounded from her thoracoabdominal[1] area.

"I-I'll go get some more sleep!"

Bang! She grabbed her tortoise-like "puppet", trotted to the interior of the house, and closed the door to her room.

Last night's dinner was too good, she ate too much and now her stomach is having trouble digesting it… Klein shook his head as he smiled, slowly walking towards his desk. He sat down soundlessly, silently pondering Dunn Smith's invitation as the crimson moon emerged from behind the dark clouds.

Being a Nighthawk civilian staff member had its apparent disadvantages.

With me being a transmigrator, "The Fool"—initiator of the mysterious Gathering—and the multiple secrets I have, it will be risky to be under the noses of the Church of Evernight's team that specializes in dealing with matters regarding the Beyonders.

As long as I join Dunn Smith and his team, I would certainly aim to become a Beyonder. I could then cover up the benefits gained from the Gathering.

Yet, becoming a formal member would entail many restrictions on my freedom, like how a civilian staff has to report his leaving of Tingen. No longer would I be able to go wherever I want or do whatever I want. I would miss many opportunities.

The Nighthawks are a strict organization. Once a mission is given, I can only wait for the arrangements and accept orders. There is no room for rejection.

Beyonders have the risk of losing control.

…

Having all the disadvantages listed out one by one, Klein turned to considering the necessities and advantages:

Judging from the situation of the luck enhancement ritual, I'm not one of the eighty percent of lucky people. In the future, there is bound to be some bizarre event happening to me, increasing the dangers I face.

Only by becoming one of the Beyonders or by joining the Nighthawks can I be equipped with the ability to resist.

The wish to become a Beyonder cannot be solely reliant on the Gathering.

The potion formula is not a major problem, but where can I find the corresponding materials? How am I to obtain and concoct them?

Not forgetting the nous of daily practice, I'm faced with serious obstacles! It is just not possible for me to consult Justice and The Hanged Man on every matter and exchange every object with them. This would not only hurt the image of The Fool and arouse their suspicions, but there will also be inadequate time to communicate on such trivial issues.

Similarly, I am unable to produce anything that can pique their interest.

Besides, more materials would more often than not leave behind the trail of my real identity. Then, "online disputes" would effectively be transformed into "offline conflicts," bringing about immense troubles.

By joining the Nighthawks, there would definitely be contact with the common knowledge of the world of mystery and relevant channels. This can sufficiently accumulate into a corresponding social circle and can be used as leverage. Only then can I initiate the Gathering and in turn gain the greatest benefits from Justice and The Hanged Man. In fact, the gains can feedback into reality, allowing me to obtain more resources and form a virtuous cycle.

Of course, I could also go to an organization that is suppressed by the various Churches such as the Psychology Alchemists mentioned by Dunn and join them.

Yet I'll also lose my freedom, and be in a constant state of fear and anxiety. However, more importantly, I have no idea where to look for them. Even if I manage to gain the corresponding information from The Hanged Man, such rash contact with them could endanger my life.

Becoming a civilian staff leaves opportunity for a buffer and exit.

The inferior recluse hides away in the wild; the superior, the crowd. Perhaps the identity as a Nighthawk can be a better cover.

In the future, when I become one of the top authorities of the tribunal, who would imagine that I am a heretic, the head of a secret organization working behind the scenes?

…

As the first rays of the morning sun shone, the crimson disappeared. Gazing at the golden light on the horizons of the sky, Klein made up his mind.

He would find Dunn Smith today and become part of the Nighthawk's civilian staff!

At this moment, Melissa, who had gotten out of bed again, had pushed open the door to the room. She was surprised to see her brother stretching in an unglamorous manner. "You didn't sleep?"

"I was thinking through some things." Klein smiled, feeling relaxed.

Melissa thought for a moment and said, "Whenever I encounter problems, I'll list out both the pros and cons one by one and compare them. After that, I would be able to get a hint of what I should do next."

"That's a good habit. I did that too," Klein smiled and replied.

Melissa's countenance was relaxed, and she did not add more. Holding a yellowish sheet of paper and her toiletries, she headed to the bathroom.

Not in a hurry to leave after breakfast and his sister's departure, Klein took a good nap. Based on what he knew, nearly all the pubs were closed in the morning.

At two o'clock in the afternoon, he smoothed the pleats of his silk hat and handkerchief using a small brush. He also removed the dirt to reestablish the tidiness.

Thereafter, he wore a suit of formal clothing, just like he was going for an interview.

Besik Street was a little far, and Klein was afraid that he would miss the "working hours" of the Nighthawks. Therefore, he did not walk there, but instead waited for a public horse carriage at Iron Cross Street.

In the Loen Kingdom, public horse carriages were placed under two categories—track and trackless.

The former consisted of a carriage drawn by two horses and could sit approximately 20 people while taking into account the top of the carriage. Only a general route existed, without specific stations. It had flexible operations and could be hailed anywhere unless it was full.

The latter was operated by the Orbital Carriage Company. First, a rail-like service device was laid on the main street. The horses would move on the inner lane while the wheels ran on the tracks, making it easier and more labor-saving. This could thus pull a bigger double-decker carriage that sat nearly fifty passengers.

However, the only problem was that the route and stations were fixed, making many places inaccessible.

After ten minutes, the sound of the wheels hitting the tracks approached from a distance. A double-decker horse carriage stopped in front of the station at Iron Cross Street.

"To Besik Street," Klein said to the carriage driver.

"You have to transfer at Champagne Street but when you get there, it takes about ten minutes to walk to Besik Street," explained the carriage driver to Klein, with regards to the route.

"Let's go to Champagne Street then." Klein nodded in approval.

"It's more than four kilometers, four pence", said a young man with a fair and clean face, as he extended his hand.

He was a worker responsible for money collection.

"Okay." Klein fished out four copper coins from his pocket and handed it to the other party.

He walked up to the carriage and found that there were not many passengers. Even on the first floor, there were a few empty seats.

"I only have three pence on me now, so I can only walk when I go back…" Klein pressed his hat down and sat down firmly.

On this floor, the men and women were mostly well-dressed although

there were a few clothed in their work clothes, leisurely reading newspapers. Almost no one spoke, and it was rather quiet.

Klein shut his eyes and recharged his strength, oblivious to the coming and going of passengers around him.

Station after station passed until he finally heard the few words "Champagne Street."

After alighting the horse carriage, he inquired along the way and soon reached Besik Street, where he saw the pub with the brownish-yellow hound logo.

Klein reached out his right hand and gave a forceful push. The heavy door gradually opened, inundating him with a wave of uproarious noises and an impetuous heat wave.

Although it was still afternoon, there were already many customers in the pub. Some were temporary workers, looking for opportunities here, waiting to be hired. Others were simply idling around, numbing themselves with alcohol.

The pub was dimly lit. In the center, there were two large iron cages with a third of its bottom sinking deep into the ground without any gaps.

People held wooden wine cups and surrounded it, sometimes discussing loudly while laughing, sometimes cursing loudly.

Giving a curious glance, Klein found two dogs caged inside. One was black and white, similar to the husky found on Earth. The other was wholly black, with shiny fur, making it look healthy and fierce.

"Do you want to bet? Doug has won eight games in a row!" said a little man wearing a brown beret, as he neared Klein and pointed to the black dog.

Bet? Taken aback at first, Klein regained his senses immediately.

"Dog-fighting?"

When he was at Khoy University, those aristocratic and wealthy

students would always ask him contemptuously and curiously, if the boorish workers and unemployed hooligans enjoyed participating in boxing and gambling at the pubs.

Besides being able to gamble on boxing and card games, didn't it also include cruel and bloody activities like cock-fighting, dog-fighting, and others?

The short man smirked. "Mister, we're civilized people. We don't engage in such unglamorous activities."

Having said that, he whispered, "Besides, laws were introduced to ban these things last year…"

"Then what are y'all betting on?" asked Klein curiously.

"The better hunter." Just as the short man finished his sentence, a resounding cacophony sounded.

He turned his head, waved his hands excitedly, and said, "You can't place a bet for this round as it has started, wait for the next one then."

Upon hearing that, Klein tipped his toes, lifted his head, and looked as far as he could.

He saw two strong men each dragging a sack, coming to the side of the iron cage and opening the "prison door." They then dumped the contents of the sack into the cage.

There were gray and disgusting animals!

Klein tried to identify them carefully before realizing that they were rats. Hundreds of rats!

As the iron cage was deep underground without any gaps, the rats moved in all directions but could not find a way out.

Right then, just as the door of the cage was closed, the chain of the two dogs were untied.

"Woof!" The black dog pounced ahead and killed a rat in one bite.

The black-and-white dog was dazed at first before it started playing excitedly with the rats.

The surrounding people either raised their wine cups and intensified their gaze or shouted loudly, "Bite it! Kill it!"

"Doug, Doug!"

*Motherf**king rat-baiting with dogs*[1]… Klein regained his senses and the corner of his mouth twitched unceasingly.

The objective of the gamble is to determine which dog can catch more rats…

Perhaps, one can even bet on the specific number of rats caught…

No wonder there were people purchasing live rats at Iron Cross Street…

That's really unique…

Klein shook his head, laughing as he backtracked, and circled along the edge of the alcoholic customers, and reached the front of the bar.

"New here?" said the bartender as he spared Klein a glance while wiping the cups. He continued, "One cup of rye beer is a penny. Enmat beer, costs two pence. Four pence for Southville beer, or do you want a cup of purely brewed malt Lanti?"

"I came here for Mr. Wright," said Klein directly and bluntly.

The bartender whistled and shouted to the side, "Old Man, someone is looking for you."

"Oh, who…" A vague voice sounded, and an intoxicated old man stood up from behind the bar.

He rubbed his eyes, shifted his gaze to Klein and asked, "Lad, were you looking for me?"

"Mr. Wright, I would like to hire a small mercenary squad for a mission," replied Klein, according to what Dunn had instructed.

"A small mercenary squad? Are you living in an adventure story? This hasn't been around for a long time!" the bartender interrupted and smiled.

Wright went silent for a few seconds before saying, "Who told you about this place?"

"Dunn. Dunn Smith," replied Klein in all honesty.

Instantly, Wright broke out in a chuckle and replied, "I see. Actually, the small mercenary squad still exists. It's just in another form, with a more contemporary name. You can find it on the second floor of No. 36 Zouteland Street."

"Thank you," thanked Klein sincerely before he turned and squeezed out of the pub.

Before he went out of the pub, the alcoholic customers who surrounded him suddenly quieted down, as they murmured, "Doug was actually defeated…"

"Defeated…"

Klein smiled and shook his head. Then he left quickly and found his way to the nearby Zoeterland Street after asking around.

"30, 32, 34… Here," he counted the house numbers and walked into the stairwell.

Going around the corner and slowly climbing up the stairs, he saw the vertical sign with the current name of the so-called small mercenary squad.

"Blackthorn Security Company."

1. Areas relating or affecting the thorax and abdomen
2. Note, this is not an invention of the author, but an actual legal blood sport known as rat-baiting back in the Victorian era.

17: Special Operations Department

"Blackthorn Security Company."

Upon seeing the signboard, Klein felt surprised yet found it reasonable.

Man… what do I say about this… He shook his head and laughed before walking up the steps and knocking gently on the half-closed door with his right hand.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

The sound echoed slowly but rhythmically, but there was no response; only a faint sputtering sound could be heard.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

Klein repeated, only to be met with the same outcome.

He switched to pushing the door, making the gap larger as he stared inside—a classic sofa which might have been for serving guests, a soft fabric armchair, and a burly wood coffee table. There was a girl with brown hair behind a table right across with her head drooped.

Even though "Security Company" is just a guise, isn't this just… just too "unprofessional?" How long has this place been out of business? Right, you guys don't need any business… Klein drew closer as he complained silently and knocked on the table just beside the girl's ear.

Knock! Knock!

The brown-haired girl sat up immediately and swiftly took the newspaper in front of her, covering her face.

Tingen City Honest Paper… Nice name… Klein silently read the title of the page facing him.

"The 'Soaring Express' steam train service, which commences today and directly connects to Constant City… Ugh, why can't they have one that goes straight to Brindisi Bay? I absolutely detest traveling by ship, it's utterly dreadful…"

The girl, with her brown hair, pretentiously read from the newspaper. Interrupting her own remarks, she lowered the paper, revealing a smooth forehead and a pair of light-brown eyes that stared at Klein with a mix of admiration and surprise. "Well, hello there! And who might you be?"

"Hello, I am Klein Moretti, and I am here at the invitation of Dunn Smith," Klein said as he took down his hat to his chest and bowed slightly.

The brown-haired girl looked to be in her early twenties. She wore a light green, Loen-styled dress. She was accentuated by the beautiful laces on her sleeves, collar, and chest.

"The Captain… alright, wait here for a moment. I'll go get him." The girl scurried up and went into the room beside her.

She didn't even serve a cup of water or anything… The level of service awareness is worrying… Klein smiled faintly as he waited at his spot.

After two to three minutes, the brown-haired girl opened the door and came out. She said with a sweet smile, "Mr. Moretti, please follow me. The Captain is on watch at 'Chanis Gate' and is unable to leave at the moment."

"Okay." Klein quickly followed behind. In his mind, he pondered to himself.

Chanis Gate, what could that be?

Going through the partition, the first thing he saw was a small

corridor, with only three offices on each side.

Some of these offices were locked tight, while some were opened, revealing someone on the inside who typed non-stop on a heavy mechanical typewriter.

At a glance, Klein noticed a familiar figure: the young officer that had investigated his apartment, the one with the black hair, green eyes, and romantic vibe of a poet.

He was not in official wear; his white collared shirt was not tucked in, making for quite an unruly appearance.

Perhaps he really is a poet… Klein nodded in greeting and was greeted with a smile.

The brown-haired girl pushed open the left office door at the end of the room and pointed inside, chirping, "We still have to go down a few levels."

This office had no furniture in place, only a grayish-white stone staircase that extended downwards.

The two sides of the stairs were lit up by gas lamps. The stable glow dispelled the darkness and gave a sense of harmony.

The brown-haired girl walked in front, staring at her feet while walking carefully.

"Though I walk here quite often, I'm still terribly afraid of falling down—tumbling like a barrel, you know! Oh, you've no idea what a foolish thing Leonard did. On his very first day as a 'Sleepless'—the first day, mind you, when he hadn't yet mastered his new powers—he tried to rush down these stairs. And—and he became a perfect cartwheel! It's rather funny when you think of it, isn't it? Yes, that was the gentleman who greeted you just now. This was about three years ago, I believe. Speaking of which, I've been with the Nighthawks for five years now; I was only seventeen when I joined..."

The girl watched her steps as she spoke. Suddenly, she smacked her forehead and said, "I forgot to introduce myself! I'm Rozanne. My father was a member of the Nighthawks, who sacrificed himself in an

accident five years ago. I suppose we are colleagues from now on—Err, yeah 'colleague' is the right word… we are not teammates since we are not Beyonders."

"I hope to have the honor, but still it depends on what Mr. Smith has to say," Klein said as he sized up the enclosed surroundings. He felt that they were going underground—dampness seeped out from the stone walls, dispelling the summer heat.

"Don't worry, the fact that you came so far means the Captain has agreed. I've always been a little afraid of him, even though he is amiable, a fatherly figure. I don't know why but I'm still afraid." Rozanne spoke as though there was a piece of sweet in her throat.

Klein answered humorously, "Isn't being afraid of a father normal?"

"True." Rozanne said as she held the wall around the bend.

As they spoke, the two finished walking down the stairs and reached a stone-paved floor.

It was a long aisle; both sides of the walls were mounted with gas lamps surrounded by metal gratings. Klein and Rozanne's shadows were elongated under the illumination.

Klein keenly noticed that there was a "Dark Sacred Emblem" every few meters—the symbol of the Evernight Goddess. A deep black background dotted with sparkling embellishments, as they clustered precisely half the crimson moon.

These emblems did not seem special, but walking between them gave Klein a sense of serenity. Rozanne also stopped talking, unlike her previous talkative state.

Before long, an intersection appeared up front. Rozanne briefly introduced,

"The path to the left will lead to the Saint Selena Cathedral; to the right are the armory, storeroom, and archives. And straight ahead is Chanis Gate."

Saint Selena Cathedral? Then, Zouteland Street is just behind Red

Moonlight Street? Klein was a little stunned.

Saint Selena Cathedral of Red Moonlight Street was the headquarters of the Church of Evernight in Tingen, a sacred ground where local followers yearned to visit. Along with "Holy Numerics Cathedral" of the Church of the God of Steam and Machinery in the suburbs, and the "River and Sea Cathedral" of the Church of Storms in North Tingen, they sustained the religious circles in Tingen City and its affiliated towns and villages.

Aware that his status made it unsuitable for him to ask more, Klein only listened silently.

They passed the intersection and moved straight ahead. In less than a minute, a black iron split gate carved with seven sacred emblems was seen.

It stood there, heavy, cold and domineering, like a giant guarding in the darkness.

"Chanis Gate." Rozanne reminded him and pointed at the room beside them, saying, "Captain is inside. Go on in by yourself."

"Alright, thank you." Klein replied politely.

The room Rozanne was referring to was just in front of "Chanis Gate." The windows were opened, revealing the lit room inside. Klein took a deep breath to calm himself.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

"Come in." He heard Dunn Smith's deep and amiable voice.

Klein opened the unlatched door gently. There was only a table and four chairs inside. Dunn Smith with his high hairline, who was wearing the black coat from the previous night plus a gold watch chain around his chest, was reading the newspaper leisurely.

"Come and have a seat. Have you decided? Are you certain you want to join us?" Dunn smiled and asked as he put down the newspaper.

Klein removed his hat and bowed, then he sat beside the table and

said, "Yes, I am certain."

"Then take a look at this deed, heh heh. People like to call it a contract now." Dunn pulled out the table drawer and took out two contract copies.

There were not many clauses, and most of them had been mentioned by Dunn Smith. The emphasis was on the confidentiality clause. Violators were tried in the tribunal courts of the Church of Evernight instead of the kingdom's courts. It was akin to how soldiers and officers were sent to court martial for trials.

A five year contract… Two pounds and ten soli for weekly wages, ten soli as compensation for the risk and confidentiality… Klein read through it and answered resolutely, "I've no problem with it."

"Then sign it," Dunn said as he pointed to the dark red fountain pen and ink.

Klein used a piece of waste paper to try out the pen before drawing a breath. He signed on both contracts with his name: Klein Moretti.

As he did not have a stamp yet, he could only use his thumbprint.

Dunn received the contract, took out a stamp from the drawer, and stamped on the end of the contract and a few key parts.

With that done, he stood up and returned a contract with one hand, and reached for Klein with the other saying, "Welcome, from now on, you are one of us, and please note that the contract is confidential as well."

Klein stood up as well. He received the contract, shook his hand, and said, "So, I shall be addressing you as Captain?"

"Yes." Dunn's grayish eyes seemed especially deep in the dim surroundings.

After shaking hands, they sat down. Klein glanced at the stamp on the contract, it read: "Nighthawk team, Tingen City, Awwa County, Loen Kingdom."

"I can't believe you guys would use the name 'Blackthorn Security Company' as a disguise," he laughed and said.

"Actually, we have other signboards." Dunn pulled out a piece of paper from the drawer.

It was stamped with the stamps of the city government and the police department. The contents were as follows: "Seventh Unit, Special Operations Department, Awwa County Police, Loen Kingdom."

"The first four units are the regular police responsible for general security, like the VIP Protection Unit and Key Installations Protection Unit. And from unit five onwards are the ones dealing with supernatural incidents in each city. Our unit is responsible for incidents related to the followers of Evernight Goddess in Tingen. If there are different types of followers, then we divide the area accordingly; we are mainly in charge of places like the north, west and the Golden Indus region."

Dunn briefly introduced, "Unit Six—the Mandated Punisher squad under the Church of Storms is in charge of the pier region, the east, and the south. The university area and the suburbs are under Unit Five, which is the Machinery Hivemind squad in Tingen."

"Right." Klein had no questions about it. He then laughed. "What happens if someone really comes here due to the 'Blackthorn Security Company' signboard and requests for our services?"

"We'll take those requests; why shouldn't we? As long as it doesn't affect our daily operations," Dunn said slowly and humorously. "Any earnings would be considered additional bonuses, so our members are quite willing to take those jobs. Anyway, the market for trivial and troublesome matters such as finding dogs and cats has been monopolized by private detectives."

"So how many people are there in this Nighthawk team?" Klein asked since they were on this topic.

"There aren't many supernatural incidents, so there are even fewer Beyonders. There are only six formal members of the Nighthawks in the entire Tingen City, including me. Heh heh, as for civilian staff,

there are six including you."

Klein nodded, and eventually asked the question that he was most concerned about, "So, Captain, what do you mean by Beyonders losing control? Why does it happen?"

18: Origin and Cause

Upon hearing Klein's question, Dunn looked out of the window toward the corridor that led to Chanis Gate. He took out his pipe, stuffed it with some tobacco and mint leaves, and held it to his nose. He took a deep whiff as his voice turned reflective and drifting.

"Only at home can I enjoy the beautiful flavors of tobacco mixed with mint leaves without any worries… Klein, do you know about the creation myth?"

"Of course, when I received primary education during Sunday school, we learned to read using The Revelation of Evernight. Among them, the Book of Wisdom and the Letters from the Saints mentioned the myth of creation." Klein attempted to recall via the memory fragments of the original Klein. He slowed down his tempo and said, "The Creator awoke from Chaos and shattered the darkness, creating the first ray of light. 'He' then fused 'Himself' completely into the universe and made up all of existence. 'His' body became the land and stars. One of 'His' eyes became the sun, while the other became the crimson moon. Some of 'His' blood rushed into the seas and rivers, nourishing and nurturing lives…"

Klein subconsciously paused when he said that. Partially, it was because the relevant memories were a blur and that the creation myth was very similar to the Chinese creation myth of Pangu.

The imaginations of people from different worlds shared something in common with their myths and legends!

Noticing that Klein was having 'trouble,' Dunn smiled and added, "His lungs turned into the elves; His heart turned into the giants; His liver turned into the treants; His brain turned into the dragons; His

kidneys turned into the feathered serpents; His hair turned into the phoenixes; His ears turned into the demonic wolves; His mouth and teeth turned into the mutants, and His remaining bodily fluids turned into the sea monsters, of which the essence was Naga. His stomach, His small and large intestines, and the evil parts of His body turned into devils, evil spirits and various kinds of unknown maleficent existences. His spirit became the Eternal Blazing Sun, the Lord of the Storms, and the God of Knowledge and Wisdom…"

"His wisdom gave birth to humanity. That was the first Epoch, the Chaos Epoch." Klein finished the last sentence for Dunn, but he found it funny and ridiculous.

As a keyboard folklorist, it was the first time he came into contact with a creation myth that was 'arranged' in such great detail. It was so detailed that almost every prominent race corresponded to a particular body part of the Creator.

It's like a children's song with children sitting in a row and eating fruit…

Furthermore, it was not only mentioned in the canon of the Evernight Goddess. The Churches of the Lord of Storms and God of Steam and Machinery also had similar descriptions. None of them elevated themselves or devalued the other gods…

This either means that the creation myth is real or hints that the few Churches had undergone a long period of strife to eventually compromise before the Fifth Epoch…

With this in mind, Klein suddenly had another question. He asked with a frown, "It feels problematic. Why are the Eternal Blazing Sun, Lord of Storms, and God of Knowledge and Wisdom born directly from the Creator's spirit, while the Goddess isn't?"

In the Revelation of Evernight's prehistorical records, the Evernight Goddess had only awoken at the end of the Second Epoch. Together with the Lord of Storms, Eternal Blazing Sun, and other gods, She blessed and helped humanity survive the Cataclysm. It was also known as the Third Epoch, the Cataclysm Epoch.

It was during that time that Earth Mother and the God of Combat

appeared as well. As for the God of Steam and Machinery, whose original name was the God of Craftsmanship, He was born only in the Fourth Epoch.

In that sense, the standing among the gods seemed self-evident.

The ones who were more ancient were more orthodox. It was extremely clear!

This also troubled the believers of the Evernight Goddess.

Dunn Smith held his pipe with another hand and instead of answering, he returned with a question, "Repeat the Goddess's full title."

Klein immediately felt like he had stabbed himself with a knife. He racked his brains and tried his best to recall.

"The Evernight Goddess stands higher than the cosmos and more eternal than eternity. She is also the Lady of Crimson, the Mother of Concealment, the Empress of Misfortune and Horror, Mistress of Repose and Silence."

Thankfully, Klein's mother was a devout believer of the Evernight Goddess. When she was still alive, she would recite this every evening at dinner. Even though the memories of the original Klein had fragmented, not all was lost.

"What does the Lady of Crimson symbolize?" Dunn asked with a guiding tone.

"The red moon." The moment Klein answered, he immediately understood.

"Then which part of the Creator did the red moon come from?" asked Dunn with a smile.

"A single eye!" Klein and Dunn smiled at each other.

This was no way less impressive than the Lord of Storms who was formed from a third of the Creator's spirit!

As for the Churches of Earth Mother and the God of Combat, they likely had similar explanations. However, the God of Steam and Machinery had been born too late to find a reason; thus, their church had been weak in the past thousand plus years. It was only with the invention of the steam engine that they seized the opportunity to truly be on par with the other gods.

Dunn stroked his pipe gently.

"Humanity was born out of the wisdom of the Creator, so we have clever and extraordinary brains, but lack other magical powers. However, from the creation myth, we can form a simple but clear conclusion. Everything stems from the same origin."

"Stems from the same origin…" Klein repeated the last few words.

"According to this conclusion, humans who are protected by the gods were able to resist the giants, devils, and the mutants. Gradually, they figured out means to obtain the power of the Beyonders. That is by using the corresponding parts of the evil spirits, dragons, monsters, magical trees, flowers, or crystals and combining them with other materials to form potions. By consuming and absorbing the potion, one will gain different powers. This is common knowledge among mysticism studies."

Dunn did not elaborate in detail and only gave a brief introduction. "In this process, our ancestors relied on painful lessons to discover that if they were to consume high-grade or extraordinary potions, it would easily lead to tragic consequences. There are three possible outcomes."

"Which three?" pressed Klein curiously.

"First, mental death and the complete breakdown of a body. Every piece of flesh would become a terrifying monster. Second, their personality will be changed by the powers contained in the potion. They will turn cold, sensitive, irascible, cruel, and indifferent. Third, well…" Dunn put down his pipe and picked up a porcelain cup and took a sip. "Fermo coffee from the Paz River Valley is bitter, but very fragrant. It leaves a splendid aftertaste. Fancy a cuppa?"

"I prefer coffee from the Feynapotter plateau. Of course, I have only drunk it a few times at Welch's place." Klein politely declined. "What's the third outcome?"

"Mental disorder. Turning crazy on the spot, becoming more devilish than the devil. This is what it means by losing control." Dunn emphasized the words 'losing control.'

Without waiting for Klein to say a word, he put down his coffee cup and continued, "After a long period of experimentation and exploration, together with the birth of the Blasphemy Slate, humans have finally perfected the potion system. We formed a tiered system that chains into stable progression paths known as Sequences. The lower the number in a Sequence, the higher the grade of a potion. At this point, the seven major churches each control at least one complete Sequence. Besides, there are also incomplete 'paths' that they have gathered over the past hundreds or thousand years."

"Blasphemy Slate?" Klein sharply noticed the term.

At the Gathering, The Hanged Man had also mentioned it!

According to The Hanged Man, the Blasphemy Slate was the most critical factor of a potion's system formation and completion!

That seemed to be different from what Dunn had just said.

"Those were things created by some evil gods. As for which era it appeared, what it contains or what's so special about it, I am unsure as well. If you discover any clues, you have to immediately report it to me. It deserves the highest level of response," said Dunn vaguely. "I mentioned one of the types of losing control. I'll now tell you the remaining four."

"Alright." Klein pushed the question of the Blasphemy Slate to the back of his mind and listened attentively.

"Although humans have clever minds, they lack extraordinary powers —it is not absolute. There are always a few lucky ones; perhaps I should call them the unlucky ones. They are born with relatively higher perception. Well, it also means the ability to sense spirits.

They can hear voices that others cannot hear and see things that others cannot see. They have partial characteristics of Beyonders."

While Dunn spoke, he looked at the empty air around him and watched Klein shudder in fear. "In other words, they are half a Sequence 9 Beyonder and have fixed characteristics. Oh, Sequence 9 is the lowest grade in the 'chain…' In short, they can only choose a corresponding, fixed Sequence pathway. If they consume other potions, the effects might range from mental disorders to a loss of control, or even worse, death."

"Got it." Klein nodded slowly.

"The third kind is similar to the second kind. Once you choose a Sequence chain, you will be forced to go down that path. There will be no room for regret. If you were to consume potions from the corresponding Sequence of other 'paths,' there will be a high probability you will get mixed, unusual and warped powers. But it is almost certain that you would be in a semi-deranged state; sensitive and irascible, cruel and bloodthirsty, and silent and melancholic.

"And there is only one such opportunity. After that, regardless if you consume the potions from the original path or potions in the present Sequence, the only result is a loss of control. The outcome could then be mental death; alternatively, the body breaks down into monsters or even transforms into an evil spirit." As Dunn spoke, he lifted his coffee cup to take a sip.

Klein, who turned alarmed and fearful after hearing this, fell silent for a few seconds before asking, "What about the fourth kind?"

"The fourth kind, heh heh. That is the most common problem. When we consume potions to gain powers that originally belong to extraordinary beings, we undergo an unnatural transformation. Therefore, we would more or less be affected by the remnant spiritual powers. While perhaps the symptoms might not manifest and are undetectable to others, it will definitely lurk in one's mind. If one rushes to consume the corresponding potion ranked higher in the Sequence before fully grasping the extraordinary powers the potion brings and eliminating the subtle traces, the madness will accumulate, increasing the chances of losing control…" Dunn

suddenly fell silent.

After a short pause, he said with a sigh, "As per the internal rules of us Nighthawks, even if a teammate were to make a great contribution, they must have consumed the last potion three years ago and be examined before they can be promoted. Even so, there are still many who lose control every year."

How terrifying… Klein drew a gasp as he asked, "Then what about the final kind?"

There was no trace of a smile despite Dunn's curved lips.

"The fifth kind is the most common reason for a loss of control. For Beyonders, one's spiritual perception would be enhanced more or less. The smaller the number in the Sequence, the more enhanced their perception. Therefore, they would hear what others cannot hear, see what others cannot see, and encounter things others would not encounter. They are constantly met with mysterious enticement and illusionary bewitchment. Once they are overstimulated or have greedy desires, they will slowly go down the path of losing control."

As he spoke, Dunn looked straight at Klein, his gray irises reflecting Klein's figure.

His tone turned bleak as he said, "The founder of the Nighthawks, Archbishop Chanis, once said, 'We are guardians, but also a bunch of miserable wretches that are constantly fighting against threats and madness.'"

19: Sealed Artifacts

"We are guardians, but also a bunch of miserable wretches that are constantly fighting against dangers and madness."

The corridor outside the window was sealed, its walls ice-cold. The room was illuminated with bright yellow lights. Dunn Smith's delivery echoed, sending blow after blow to Klein's heart. It left him temporarily at a loss for words.

Dunn shook his head and smiled when he saw Klein silent.

"Are you very disappointed? Beyonders are not like what you imagine them to be. We are always treading alongside danger."

"There is always a price to any gain." Klein recovered from his shock as he answered with a quivering voice.

Klein had never imagined that the mystique and otherworldly nature of being a Beyonder could harbor such hidden dangers. Maybe it was easier to dismiss these threats when he was only hearing about them secondhand, or perhaps it was because he'd already been swept up in his own bizarre incident. Either way, he quickly reined in his fear and anxiety, forcing himself to stay calm.

Of course, the thought of shrinking back was inevitable; it lingered around and refused to leave.

"Not bad. Very mature and rational…" Dunn finished the last mouthful of coffee and added, "Also, Beyonders are not as powerful as you imagine them to be, especially a low-Sequence Beyonder. Heh, why would we use 1 to represent the highest grade and 9 the lowest? Isn't this against intuition and logic? The low Sequence we often

mention refers to a low grade or a high number. They are the starting point of the Sequence chain.

"Alright, where was I? Yes, Beyonders are not as powerful as you imagine. A low-Sequence Beyonder's power is no match for guns, much less cannons. They are just more fascinating and indefensible than firearms. If you have a chance to become a Beyonder in the future, you must consider what I said today carefully. Do not make a rash decision."

Klein gave a self-deprecating smile.

"I don't even know when I will have the chance."

He felt that he would not miss the opportunity if it presented itself to him. Consuming the wrong potion or a higher-ranked potion in the Sequence could be mostly avoided. The major potential danger was the subtle influences the potions had and what he experienced from having heightened auditory and visual perceptions.

For the former, he could draw on the experiences from generations of people before him. As long as he was not in a rush to advance himself and patiently grasped control over his powers, the chances of losing control were relatively low. Furthermore, he still had to resolve the potential problem that he currently faced. He had to understand the essence of mysticism and seek a way to transmigrate back. These were the underlying reasons for taking the first step. He did not aim for higher Sequence spots. If it was easy to lose control, he could just forget about advancement, stay in his original Sequence, and rely on knowledge to plan a way 'home.'

It was needless to elaborate on the potential risks. Back when Klein held the luck enhancement ritual, he was nearly driven crazy. The murmurings that nearly blew up his head were still fresh in his mind. It wasn't something he could avoid by simply choosing not to be a Beyonder; therefore, it was better to gain power that allowed him to defend himself.

With this in mind, Klein felt that the pros clearly outweighed the cons. It made his thoughts of withdrawal almost disappear.

Dunn picked up his pipe again as his gray eyes carried a smiling trace to them.

"I cannot give you an accurate answer on this. To become a Beyonder, firstly, you must make enough contributions. Perhaps tomorrow or the day after, you would be able to interpret critical ancient documents. Maybe you would be able to give us valuable ideas for one of our cases? Secondly, it depends on the arrangements of the higher-ups. No one can be sure.

"Alright, I believe you should know quite a bit about Beyonders now. In the future, do not make a rash decision. Now, I'll introduce you to our Nighthawk team's civilian jobs."

He stood up and walked to the door. He pointed in the opposite direction of Chanis Gate and said, "We have an accountant and someone else who is in charge of procuring necessities and collecting supplies handed out by the Church and the police department while standing in as a carriage driver. They are professionals and do not need to take shifts, so they can rest on weekends. The other three civilian staff are Rozanne, Bredt, and Old Neil. Their jobs include: attending to visitors, cleaning the rooms, and writing case files and inventory registration lists. They also guard the armory, storeroom, and the archives, strictly enforcing the registration should someone wish to enter, take out or return an item. Each of them has one day off a week, other than Sundays. They negotiate among themselves on the arrangement of night shifts and rest days."

"So is my job scope the same as Rozanne and the rest?" Klein swept away his thoughts about Beyonders and tried to clarify his job responsibilities.

"No, there's no need. You are a professional," said Dunn with a smile. "You currently have two tasks. First, every morning or afternoon, go take a stroll outside. Focus on the various streets that lead from Welch's place to yours."

"What?" Klein was dumbfounded.

What kind of job is this?

Is that very professional?

Dunn inserted his hands into the pockets of his black trench coat and said, "After you confirm that you have lost your memories, we will close the case on Welch and Naya. Similarly, that diary of the Antigonus family has vanished completely. We suspect that you brought it with you. You might have hidden it on your way home which might be why we did not find any clues at your place. This is also likely the reason why you were not there and chose to commit suicide at home.

"Although you were mysteriously influenced and have forgotten this piece of memory, the human spirit and brain is very fascinating, so there might be residual traces. Daly might not be able to obtain them through her means as a medium, but it does not mean that they do not exist. Perhaps you will feel a sense of déjà vu at a familiar and critical spot.

"That is what we wish to obtain."

"Got it." Klein was enlightened.

The Nighthawks' deduction of the diary's location was indeed reasonable.

He was the only one alive among the people involved. Only he had the time and motive to take the diary away and hide it on his way back!

"If you can find the diary this way, you will likely make enough of a contribution to become a Beyonder," encouraged Dunn, indirectly revealing the importance of the diary.

"I hope." Klein nodded.

Dunn changed the subject again.

"Secondly, you get a day off every week. You can decide which day it is for now. When you are not outside, go to our armory and read the literature and canon books. This is a job for a professional historian. When you finish them all, you will have to begin taking shifts with Old Neil and the rest."

"Alright, no problem." Klein heaved a sigh of relief.

This is not something too difficult…

At this moment, Dunn turned his body halfway and pointed to the black outward-swinging gates that were engraved with seven sacred emblems.

"This is Chanis Gate. It is named after the creator of the modern Nighthawks system, Archbishop Chanis. There is one under the central cathedral of every major city.

"It is guarded by formal Nighthawk members on rotation. Inside, there are at least two 'Keepers' who are sent by the Church, as well as countless traps. You must not approach it under any circumstances; otherwise, misfortune will befall you."

"That sounds scary," Klein expressed his feelings.

"The area inside is divided into a few zones. Stored within are certain potion formulas for certain Sequences and other magical materials. It is also used to temporarily hold heretics, mutants, cultists, and members of secret organizations. Heh heh, they will eventually be sent to the Holy Cathedral," introduced Dunn in passing.

Holy Cathedral? The headquarters of the Church of Evernight located in the Winter County to the north of the kingdom, Cathedral of Serenity? Klein nodded slightly as though he was pondering over the matter.

"In addition, there are all sorts of classified documents and records inside. When you gain a higher clearance, you might have a chance of reading them." Dunn hesitated for a moment before adding, "Behind the Chanis Gate, there are also Sealed Artifacts in the basement."

"Sealed Artifacts?" Klein ruminated on the terms.

It sounded like a specialized term.

"Some of the extraordinary items we gather and retrieve are just too important and magical. If they fall into the wrong hands, it would cause immense destruction. Therefore, we have to keep it strictly

confidential and watch them carefully. Even we can only use it under special circumstances. Besides…" With that said, Dunn paused for a moment before continuing, "Besides, there are some things inside that are very special. They have certain 'living' characteristics which can entice the Keepers. They would influence the surroundings, attempt escape, and cause catastrophic outcomes. They have to be strictly controlled."

"How fascinating," commented Klein wistfully.

"The Nighthawks headquarters have categorized these Sealed Artifacts into four grades. Grade 0 represents Extremely Dangerous. They are of the highest importance and of the highest confidentiality. They are not to be inquired, disseminated, described, or spied. They can only be sealed in the basement of the Holy Cathedral," described Dunn in detail. "Grade 1 is Highly Dangerous. They can be used in limited ways. Their security clearance is limited to diocesan bishops or Nighthawks deacons and above. The central cathedral of diocese headquarters like Backlund can store one to two artifacts. The rest will be handed over to the Holy Cathedral.

"Grade 2 is Dangerous. They can be used with care and moderation. The security clearance requires one to be a bishop or a Nighthawk team's captain and above. The central cathedrals in the various cities can store three to five artifacts. The rest will be turned in to the Holy Cathedral or the diocese headquarters. Grade 3 is Considerably Dangerous. They have to be used carefully. It can only be requested for operations that require three or more people.. The security clearance requires one to be a formal member of the Nighthawks."

"In the future, you will see the corresponding documents. Through the numbers, you can understand what they represent. For instance, 2-125 means that it is a Dangerous grade Sealed Artifact No. 125."

As Dunn went on, he suddenly turned around and returned to his room. He pulled out a piece of paper from the bottom of the drawer.

"By the way, take a look at this. Three years ago, a newly appointed archbishop lost control. For some unknown reason, he stormed through the various levels of protection and vanished mysteriously with a Grade 0 Sealed Artifact. Memorize this photo. If you discover

him, do not alert or disturb him. Return to report it immediately or the chance of you dying in the line of duty is a thousand percent."

"What?" Klein received the piece of paper. There was no title on it, just a black and white photo with a few lines of words.

"Ince Zangwill. Male. Forty years old. Former archbishop. A Gatekeeper who failed to advance and fell to corruption after being tempted by the devil. He fled with Sealed Artifact 0-08. His distinguishing characteristics include…"

The picture, together with the description, depicted Ince Zangwill as wearing an all-black clergyman robe with buttons on both sides and a soft cap. His hair was dark blonde and his pupils were so blue that it was nearly black. He had a high nose and his lips were tightly pursed. His facial features were like a classic sculpture without any wrinkles. The most striking characteristic was that he was blind in one eye.

"The description of the corrupted is so detailed but the only thing about the Sealed Artifact is its codename…" Klein honestly offered his first impression.

"That's why it is at the highest security clearance. The search for Sealed Artifact 0-08 is only described verbally and never written in words. Even so, the description will be succinct," said Dunn with a sigh. "0-08 appears to be a common quill, but it does not need ink to write. That's all."

Dunn did not dive deeper into the topic. He tugged at the golden chain on his black trench coat and took out a gorgeous pocket watch of the same color. He clicked it open and took a glance before pointing outside.

"That's all you need to know for now. Head to the armory and find Old Neil—he'll set you up with the documents you need to read. Don't let his desk job fool you; he's not just some civilian clerk. He used to be a full member, but between his age, poor health, and inability to advance, fieldwork is out of the question now. He turned down both an internal Keeper position and retirement. All he wants is to spend his days surrounded by files and records."

20: The Forgetful Dunn

"Okay." Klein bowed slightly as he wore his short top hat again. However, his mind was preoccupied with how Sealed Artifact 0-08 looked.

It appears to be just your everyday quill?

It writes without ink?

Then, what is its actual use? What makes it classified at the highest level of confidentiality that it's deemed Extremely Dangerous?

Can it be a pen that kills anyone whose name is written?

No, that would be way too heaven-defying. Ince Zangwill wouldn't need to escape and hide away if that were the case…

Just as Klein turned around to leave, Dunn suddenly shouted out to him.

"Hold on. I forgot something."

"What?" Klein turned his head; his eyes puzzled.

Dunn put back his pocket watch and said with a smile, "Later, remember to visit the accountant, Mrs. Orianna, and get an advance payment of four weeks—a total of twelve pounds. After that, you'll earn half your salary every week until the difference is covered."

"That's too much. There's no need for this, the amount should be reduced," said Klein subconsciously.

He had no objection towards an advanced payment. After all, he

didn't even have the money needed to pay for the public horse carriage trip home. However, to receive twelve pounds at once left him a little afraid.

"No, it's necessary," said Dunn as he shook his head and smiled. "Think about it. Do you still wish to continue living in your present apartment? One that needs you to share a bathroom with so many other tenants? Even if you aren't taking yourself into consideration, think about the lady. Besides…"

He paused when he saw Klein nod in agreement. He smiled and sized up Klein's garbs and said with a meaningful intent, "Besides, you need a cane, and you should buy a new suit."

Klein was taken aback for a second before snapping back to reality. His face immediately burned with embarrassment since the suit he was wearing was cheap and of inferior quality.

Typically, a top hat was made of silk, costing five to six soli. A bow tie was three soli, a walking cane inlaid with silver was seven to eight soli, a shirt was three soli, while pants, a vest, and tuxedo were around seven pounds in total. Leather boots were nine to ten soli. As such, an entire suit cost more than eight pounds and seven soli. Of course, to be a presentable gentleman, one needed a watch chain, a pocket watch, and a wallet.

Back then, the original Klein and Benson scrimped and saved before managing to save up a pool of money. When they went to a clothing store to check the price, they ended up running off without even bothering to haggle. They each bought a set at a bargain shop near Iron Cross Street for a total of less than two pounds.

It was also because of that incident that original Klein had a deep impression of the prices of clothes.

"O-Okay," Klein stammered a reply.

He was like the original Klein. He was someone who cared about his appearance.

Dunn took out the pocket watch again and clicked it open to take a

glance at it.

"Perhaps you should find Mrs. Orianna first? I know you'll spend quite some time at Old Neil's while Mrs. Orianna will likely be returning home soon."

"Alright." Klein was acutely aware of his state of poverty and did not object to it.

Dunn returned to the table's side and pulled at a few hanging ropes as he said, "I'll get Rozanne to bring you there."

The ropes began their operation as the gears ground, producing a chime from a bell at the reception area of Blackthorn Security Company. When Rozanne heard it, she hurriedly stood up and carefully made her way down.

It did not take long before she appeared in front of Klein again.

Dunn said humorously, "I did not disturb your rest, right? Oh, bring Moretti to Mrs. Orianna."

Rozanne secretly curled her lips as she answered 'happily—'

"Alright, Captain."

"Is that all?" At that moment, Klein blurted out in surprise.

To get my advance payment from finance, isn't there a need to get an approval letter from the Captain? Shouldn't you write something?

"So?" Dunn returned with a question.

"I mean— Don't I need your signature to claim an advance payment from Mrs. Orianna?" Klein tried his best to use simple language.

"Oh, no. There's no need. Rozanne is enough proof." Dunn pointed at the brown-haired girl and gave a reply.

Captain, it seems there's almost zero management of our finances… Klein resisted his urge to deliver a sarcastic comment before turning to leave the room with Rozanne.

At that moment, he heard Dunn shout out again.

"Hold on. There's still another thing."

Can we finish it all at once? Klein turned back with a smiling face.

"Yes?"

Dunn pressed at his temple and said, "When you meet Old Neil, remember to collect ten demon hunting bullets."

"Me? Demon hunting bullets?" Klein returned in astonishment.

"Welch's revolver is still with you, right? There's no need for you to turn it in." Dunn inserted a single hand into his pocket and said, "With the demon hunting bullets, if you were to face a paranormal danger, you will be able to protect yourself. Uh, it will give you some courage at the very least."

There's no need for you to add on the final sentence… Just as Klein was vexing over the problem, he answered without any hesitation, "Alright. I'll remember to do so!"

"This will require me to write a formal document. Wait a moment." Dunn sat down and picked up the dark red fountain pen. He scribbled a 'note,' signed it, and stamped it.

"Thank you, Captain." Klein received it sincerely.

He slowly walked back before turning around.

"Hold on."

Dunn shouted one more time.

…Captain, you look to be in your thirties. Why do you have the symptoms of dementia? Klein squeezed out a smile and turned around to ask, "Anything else?"

"I forgot earlier that you are not trained in shooting, so getting demon hunting bullets would be useless. Let's do this; collect thirty normal bullets every day. Take the opportunity when you are out to

go to the street corner—the underground shooting range at No. 3 Zouteland Street. Most of it belongs to the police department, but there is one that is specially for us Nighthawks. Oh, right, you also need to get a badge from Old Neil. Otherwise, you won't be able to enter the shooting range." Dunn smacked his forehead and took back the note from Klein. He then added the information and stamped it with another seal.

"A good marksman is produced by expending bullets. Do not think lightly of it." Dunn handed back Klein the modified note.

"Got it." Klein, who was fearful of danger, yearned to visit the shooting range that very day.

He took two steps towards the exit before carefully turning around halfways. He deliberated before asking, "Captain, is there anything else?"

"No." Dunn nodded firmly.

Klein heaved a sigh of relief and walked straight out the door. While walking, he had the strong urge to turn around to ask another, "Are you sure there's nothing else?"

He resisted that urge and finally left the Keeper room successfully.

"Captain has always been this way. He often forgets things." As Rozanne walked by his side, she softly disparaged the captain, "Even my granny has a better memory than him. Of course, he only forgets the trivial stuff. Yea, trivial stuff. Klein, I'll call you Klein in the future. Mrs. Orianna is a very affable person. It is easy to hit it off with her. Her father is a watchsmith with excellent skill…"

As Klein listened to the brown-haired girl rattle on, he stepped into the stairwell and returned to the upper floor. He found Mrs. Orianna in the far office on the right-hand side.

She was a black-haired woman dressed in a flounce lace dress. She appeared in her thirties and had fashionable curly hair. Her pair of green eyes were clear and smiling, and she seemed refined and elegant.

After Orianna heard Rozanne repeat Dunn Smith's instructions, she took out a note and wrote an advance slip.

"Sign here. Do you have a seal? If not, you can leave a thumbprint."

"Alright." Now familiar with the procedures, Klein completed the formalities.

Orianna took out a copper key and opened the safe in the room. As she counted the pounds, she said with a smile, "You are lucky. We have enough cash today. By the way, Klein, were you invited by Captain because you were involved in a paranormal activity and the fact that you have a specialty?"

"Yes, you have an impeccable intuition." Klein was not stingy with his compliments.

Orianna took out four notes with light-gray backgrounds with deep black patterns printed on them. After locking the safe, she turned around and smiled.

"That's because I had a similar experience too."

"Really?" Klein showed an appropriate level of surprise.

"Do you know about the serial killer that sent Tingen City into a frenzy sixteen years ago?" Orianna handed over the four gold-pound notes to Klein.

"…Yes! It's the one which had five girls killed consecutively. Some had their hearts and stomachs removed by that Bloody Butcher? My mother often used that matter to scare my sister when we were young," said Klein as he thought about it.

He received the notes and discovered that two of them were in five pound denominations and two of them were in one pound denominations. All of them had a gray background and were inked in black. The four corners had complicated patterns and special ink to prevent counterfeiting.

The slightly larger five-pound bills featured a portrait of Henry Augustus I, the Loen Kingdom's fifth king and direct ancestor of the

current ruler, George III. The king's round face was framed by a white headband, his narrow eyes gazing out with an almost severe expression. Despite the stern portrait, Klein felt an odd sense of affinity with the long-dead monarch.

This was a five-pound note!

It's almost equal to four weeks of Benson's salary!

The one-pound note featured George III's father, the former king William Augustus VI. This formidable ruler bore a thick mustache and a steely, determined gaze. Under his reign, the Loen Kingdom broke free from the constraints of the old order and reclaimed its position as a leading power among nations.

They were all 'good kings…' Klein could faintly smell the notes' ink that elated and refreshed him.

"Yes, if the Nighthawks had not come in time, I would have been the sixth victim." Mrs. Orianna's tone still hinted at a sense of lingering fear despite the incident having happened more than ten years ago.

"I heard that the serial killer, no— The Butcher was a Beyonder?" Klein carefully folded the paper notes and placed it in an inner pocket of his suit. Then, he patted the area a few times to confirm it was there.

"Yes." Mrs. Orianna gave a firm nod. "He had killed even more before that. The reason why he was captured was because he was preparing a ritual for the devil."

"No wonder he wanted different organs… Sorry, Mrs. Orianna for making you recall such unpleasant memories," said Klein sincerely.

Orianna smiled. "I'm no longer afraid… I was studying accountancy in business school back then. After that incident, I've been here ever since. Alright, I'll stop keeping you from what you should do. You still need to head to Old Neil's."

"Goodbye, Mrs. Orianna." Klein took off his hat and bowed before leaving the office. Before he went downstairs, he could not help but pat his inner pocket to make sure the twelve pounds were still there.

He did a turn at a cross-junction and headed right. It did not take him long to see a half-closed iron door.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

While he knocked, an aged voice sounded from inside.

"Come in."

Klein pushed open the metal door and discovered a cramped room which only allowed for a desk and two chairs.

There was a tightly locked iron door inside the room and behind the desk was a hoary elder dressed in a class black robe. He was reading a few yellowed pages from a book with the illumination of a gas lamp.

He raised his head and looked at the door.

"Are you Klein Moretti? Rozanne came by earlier and mentioned you were most courteous."

"Miss Rozanne is truly a gracious young lady. Good afternoon, Mr. Neil." Klein removed his hat with a respectful bow.

"Have a seat." Neil pointed to the silver tin can with complex flowery patterns on the table. "Would you like a cup of handground coffee?"

The wrinkles at the edge of his eyes and mouth were deeply recessed. His dark red pupils appeared slightly turbid.

"It doesn't seem like you drink coffee?" Klein acutely noticed that Neil's porcelain cup was filled with clear water.

"Haha, it's a habit of mine. I do not drink coffee after three in the afternoon," Neil explained with a laugh.

"Why?" Klein asked in passing.

Neil held back his smile as he looked into Klein's eyes and said, "I'm afraid that it would affect my sleep at night. That will make me hear the murmurings of unknown existences."

Klein was momentarily unable to answer him as he changed the subject.

"Mr. Neil, what documents and books should I read?"

As he spoke, he took out the note written by Dunn.

"Anything that has to do with history, or is complicated and incomplete. To be honest, I have always been trying to learn, but all I can achieve is a rudimentary grasp. It's just too troublesome for the other materials, such as people's diaries, contemporary books, epitaphs, etc…" lamented Neil. "For example, the things I have here require more detailed historical records to determine the exact content."

"Why?" Klein turned confused.

Neil pointed to a few yellowed pages in front of him.

"These are from Roselle Gustav's lost diary before his death. In order to keep things secret, he used strange symbols he invented to keep record."

Emperor Roselle? The transmigration senior? Klein was taken aback as he immediately listened attentively.

"Many people believe that he did not truly die, but instead became a hidden god. Therefore, cults which revere him have always been holding various rituals to attempt at gaining power. We will occasionally encounter such incidents and obtain a few original or duplicated copies of the diary," Neil said with a shake of his head. "Till date, no one has been able to decipher the special symbols' true meaning. Therefore, the Holy Cathedral has permitted us to keep copies for research, hoping that it would bring them a pleasant surprise."

With that said, Neil revealed a smug smile.

"I have already deciphered a few symbols and have confirmed that they represent numbers. Look at what I discovered. It's actually a diary! Yes, I wish to use history from different periods, especially events that revolved around the emperor. By comparing those records

to the ones written in the diary for the corresponding day, I can try to interpret more of the symbols.

"That's the mind of a genius, right?" The old gentleman with white hair and deep wrinkles looked at Klein with bright eyes.

Klein nodded in agreement.

"Yes."

"Haha, you can also take a look at it. Tomorrow, you will have to help me with this diary." Neil pushed the few yellowed pages towards Klein.

Klein turned them around and took a glance at them, but it immediately stunned him!

Although the 'symbols' had been copied in terribly ugly fashion, to the point of looking a little distorted, there was no way he could be mistaken…

This was because they were words he was most familiar with.

Chinese!

*And it's f**king Simplified Chinese!*

21: An Old Friend In A Different World

In that instant, Klein even believed that he had transmigrated back. However, the elegant gas lamp surrounded by brass grids and the silver-inlaid tin, which Old Neil kept his handground coffee in, made him recognize the reality he was in.

The transmigrator, Emperor Roselle, is really a fellow countryman of mine?

He was using Simplified Chinese—which doesn't exist in this world—to record secrets? With the indescribable feeling of identifying an old friend in a different world, Klein quickly read through the three pages.

"18th November. Truly a fascinating matter. A blue-sky experimentation and a chance mistake made me discover the pathetic fellow lost and trapped in the deep darkness amid the storms. He can only approach the reality of this world on the day of the full moon every month; yet, he is unable to transmit his cries. He is lucky to have met me, the protagonist of this era."

"After reading the paragraph I wrote above, I suddenly felt a little down. Even my Chinese is written like a translation. Four decades have passed in a finger snap. My past memories feel more like a dream."

"1184, 1st January. At the grand New Year Gala, Lady Florena was truly splendid."

"2nd January. My diplomats are all idiots!"

"3rd January. I made a hasty choice back then. In hindsight, I should have chosen the Apprentice, the Seer, or the Marauder. Unfortunately, there is no way of redoing it."

"4th January. Why are my children so stupid? I've repeated myself so many times. Do not be fooled by those charlatans! The key thing about potions is not about grasping them, but digesting them! It's nothing about tapping powers, but acting! And the name of a potion is not solely symbolic at its core, but a concrete imagery, and the 'key' to digestion!"

"22nd September. An alliance opposing me has been established. Feysac from the north, Loen from the east, Feynapotter from the south. My enemies have finally joined forces, but I have no fear. I will use facts to teach them that generations of weapons and knowledge cannot be compensated by mere numbers and Low-Sequence Beyonders. Besides, it's not as though I do not have subordinates. As for the higher-grades, heh heh. Have they forgotten who I am?"

"23rd September. I have lost communications with the ship seeking the Forsaken Land of the Gods. I should consider inventing wireless telegraphs. I hope it will not be affected by the storms."

"24th September. Miss Ithaca is more mesmerizing than Lady Florena. Perhaps, I'm just being nostalgic about my youth."

Due to the complexity of characters in Simplified Chinese, the font was slightly larger than normal, leading to less content on each page. Furthermore, for preservational and research purposes, the back of each page was left empty. But even so, Klein still felt an upheaval of emotions when he read the diary. In particular, Emperor Roselle's description of the crux of potions made him feel like he found the path to the solution. He was thrilled at having learned a priceless secret.

Perhaps, this will be a beacon for my future path as a Beyonder! Well, the three pages belong to entries at different times. It seems Emperor Roselle only writes the year on the first entry of each year. It cannot be determined which year the two pages with September and November belong to… Who is the pathetic fellow he discovered?

What do "digesting" and "acting" actually mean?

Where is the Forsaken Land of the Gods? …

These questions bubbled in Klein's head. It made him eager to immediately gather all of Emperor Roselle's diary and read it from cover to cover!

"Klein?" At that moment, Old Neil asked puzzledly across him.

Klein jolted awake as he hurriedly covered it up with a laugh. "I thought I would be the most special one. I was trying to decipher and interpret it."

"You are young indeed." Old Neil nodded, laughing. "I once believed that I was the most special one as well."

Klein flipped through the three pages in his hand and after confirming that he had not missed anything, he handed it over to Old Neil and thoughtlessly asked, "Do we only have these few pages?"

I want to see more of Emperor Roselle's diary! "Did you think there would be many?" Old Neil caressed the scripts as his wrinkles deepened from his scoff. "There are not many incidents a year that involve Beyonders and mystery to begin with. Sigh, the major reason is the gradual extinction of extraordinary species in our Northern Continent. Without them, there won't be a lot of potions, causing the number of Beyonders to reduce with time. Sigh, over the past few centuries, dragons, giants, and elves have become simply records in books. Even the seafolks are no longer seen near the coastal waters."

Upon hearing this, Klein suddenly thought of a meme. He immediately said with a smile, "I think it's time to establish a Dragons and Giants Protection Association."

Old Neil looked confused when he heard that. It took him quite some time to figure out what it meant. After figuring out its meaning, he rapped the table and laughed quite heartily in a not-so-gentlemanly manner.

"Haha, Klein, you really are humorous. This is a tradition of our Loen Kingdom. It's good that young people have a sense of humor. I

believe we shouldn't be overly narrow in scope. Why are we only protecting dragons and giants? It should be called Fantastic Beasts Protection Association."

"No, no, no. How can we forget those poor plants?" Klein shook his head.

They exchanged looks and proclaimed in unison: "Fantastic Organisms Protection Association!"

Both of them laughed tacitly. The awkwardness and unfamiliarity of the atmosphere between them dissipated considerably.

"There are fewer interesting young people like you these days… Where was I?" Old Neil's wrinkles suffused a smile as he said, "I remember. There are not many incidents a year that involve Beyonders and mystery to begin with. The retards who revere Emperor Roselle are the minority of the minority. It's already pretty good that we can obtain three scripts… Well, the other larger cathedrals or dioceses might have some…"

After muttering a few words, he took the approval note which Klein had placed on the table earlier and took a look.

"Are they pistol bullets, rifle bullets, or steam-pressured bullets?"

"It's a revolver," answered Klein honestly.

"Alright. I'll go get them. Ahem, do you have an underarm holster? As a gentleman, we can't let you have something bulging below your waist in public." Old Neil made a joke that all men understood.

"Heh, no. Do I need to get Captain to include it?" Klein smiled cooperatively.

Old Neil stood up and said, "There's no need. I just need to make a record. It's an accessory item. Repeat after me: accessory item."

"Were you a teacher in the past?" joked Klein.

"I spent some time at the Church's Sunday school and free schools." Old Neil waved the note and took out a key from the drawer. He then

opened the iron door that led into an inner chamber.

Beyonders do not seem much different from commoners… Klein murmured silently before casting his gaze on the table where the three pages of the diary were.

Emperor Roselle is indeed involved in the realm of mystery…

His diary is invaluable… *To others, they are just pieces of scrap paper. It is unknown when they will be deciphered, but they are a valuable treasure to me!*

I wonder where the remaining parts of the diary are…

I have to think of ways to get more… Klein's mind went through upheavals as he could hardly calm down. This continued until Old Neil came out and closed the iron door.

"Ten demon hunting bullets, thirty revolver bullets. An ox-hide underarm holster, and a Seventh Unit, Special Operations Department badge. Please count them and give them a try. Remember to sign the log book." Old Neil placed the items down on the table.

The revolver bullets were arranged neatly in a paper box which was divided into three layers. The bullets shimmered with a yellow sheen just like the bullets back home, but they appeared narrower.

As for the demon hunting bullets, they were kept in a small iron box. The shape was identical to regular revolver bullets, but their surface was silver in color. Upon a more careful examination, there were complicated and dazzling patterns with tiny Sacred Emblems—a black background dotted with stars and a half crimson moon—engraved at the bottom.

The ox-hide holster felt solid and it came with a belt and buckle. Beside it was a badge half the size of a palm. It had a metallic background with "Awwa County Police Department and Seventh Unit, Special Operations Department" inscribed in silver text. They formed almost two sealed circles and surrounded the "two crossed swords and a crown" police emblem.

"Unfortunately, it's not a Nighthawks badge," Klein said half wistfully

and half probingly.

Old Neil smiled and urged Klein to test the underarm holster.

After he took off his jacket, Klein took quite a bit of effort to buckle up the holster, which hung close to his left armpit.

"Not bad." He put on his jacket again.

Old Neil sized him up and nodded in satisfaction.

"It suits you well. My judgment is as accurate as usual."

After putting away the other items into his pockets and signing the log book, Klein had a short, casual conversation with Old Neil before leaving.

Halfway, he suddenly slapped himself in the forehead.

"I forgot to learn more about the Sequences and potions. It's all the fault of Emperor Roselle's diary…"

At this point, he was still unaware of what the first Sequence of the complete pathway the Church of Evernight possessed. All he knew was that it started with Sequence 9.

Rozanne had apparently mentioned something… The Sleepless? Just as Klein was slowly walking towards the stairs, a person came down.

He wore tight trousers which made movement easy. His white shirt was not tucked in, and he had a clear romantic temperament of a poet. He was none other than the black-haired, green-eyed police inspector who had previously come to search Klein's place. They had met upstairs previously, but they had not exchanged words.

"Good afternoon," greeted the young poet-like Nighthawk with a smile.

"Good afternoon. I believe I do not need to introduce myself?" answered Klein humorously.

"There's no need. I have a deep impression of you." The young

Nighthawk extended his right hand and said, "Leonard Mitchell. Sequence 8 Midnight Poet."

Sequence 8… He's really a poet… Klein smilingly shook his hand as he returned with a question, "You have a deep impression of me?"

Leonard Mitchell's green eyes were deep as he replied with a very faint smile. "You have a special disposition."

He feels and sounds so gay… The corners of Klein's mouth moved slightly as he barely said with a smile, "I don't think so myself."

"After encountering an accident like that, you remained alive despite not receiving our protection immediately. That makes you special enough." Leonard pointed ahead. "I have to replace Captain. See you tomorrow."

"See you tomorrow." Klein turned to make way for the Nighthawk.

As he walked to the ends of the stairwell, Leonard Mitchell suddenly turned around and stared at the stone-paved ground which was illuminated by the yellow sunset. He muttered into the air softly, "Did you manage to notice anything…"

…

"Indeed, there's nothing special about him…"

22: Starting Sequence

After he went up the stairs and returned to the reception hall, Klein was about to bid Rozanne farewell when he heard the brown-haired girl mention briskly, "Captain says that you can come on Monday. He wants you to settle your household affairs first."

"…Alright." Klein never expected the Nighthawks' management to be so humane and accommodating. It made him feel a little grateful.

He was planning on waking early the next morning and making use of the opportunity to "wander around" to visit Tingen University. He planned on informing the staff in charge of the interview that he was not participating in the follow-up interviews. After all, he had originally obtained the opportunity to make the interview because of his professor's recommendation letter. Regardless, it was basic courtesy to have formal closure. Even if it was not for himself, he had to respect his mentor's efforts.

And in a world without telephones, where telegrams were charged by the character, and the fact that it would be too late to send a letter, he felt that taking the public carriage to the university was the most economical and suitable solution.

Having received the Captain's special approval, Klein did not need to tire himself out. He could wake up late and still make his way there on time.

Klein was just about to take off his hat to bid Rozanne farewell when he suddenly thought of something. He looked around and suppressed his voice. "Rozanne, do you know what the starting point of the Church's complete Sequence is?"

He had forgotten to ask Old Neil.

Rozanne's eyes widened as she looked at Klein in astonishment. "You wish to become a Beyonder?"

Was I that obvious? Klein's body language betrayed him as he answered in embarrassment, "Having learned that extraordinary and mysterious powers exist in the world, it's inevitable that I have some yearnings for it."

"Oh my Goddess. Do you know how dangerous it is? Didn't Captain tell you? The enemies of Beyonders are not just cultists or dark warlocks, but themselves! People lose control nearly every year. Some even end up sacrificing themselves! Aren't you going to consider how your family will feel?" Rozanne's hand gestures amplified her tone as her reaction appeared overly agitated. "Klein, I think the better choice is to be a civilian staff. There's nearly no danger, and our salary increases every year. After a few years of work, you will have saved up plenty of money. You can then rent a detached house in North Borough or in the suburbs. You can then marry a rich and charming lady and have a wonderful family. You can then have adorable and naughty little angels…"

"Rozanne, stop! Hold up!" Klein hurriedly stopped her in exasperation when he realized that she was changing the subject. "I just want to… to, well, understand the basics for now."

"Alright…" Rozanne fell silent for a few seconds as she lowered her gaze, feeling somewhat sorry. "Due to what happened to my father, whenever I face similar problems, I tend to be… well, you know, a little agitated. However, to be honest, I'm filled with respect towards any man or woman who willingly wishes to be a Nighthawk."

"I understand, I understand," echoed Klein.

Rozanne blinked her light brown eyes and added, "My father once said that one should never think that they can resolve hidden risks or combat danger by simply becoming more powerful or a Beyonder of a higher Sequence. In fact, it's the opposite. They will encounter more terrifying matters. When facing the unknown or a terrifying existence, death and insanity are the only two outcomes. Heh, he

ended up sacrificing himself two weeks after saying that… Klein, don't look at me with pity. My life is great now, really great! It's only right to feel fear towards these matters!"

"I only want to know the basics…" Klein repeated his previous reply, not sure whether he should laugh or cry.

Captain explained it more clearly than you. And even if I do not become a Beyonder, I have already encountered something extraordinary…
"Alright," said Rozanne ruminatively. "I've heard Captain's and Old Neil's conversation before. As extraordinary creatures are declining or going extinct, few High-Sequence Beyonders exist in this era. It's already very impressive to become a Beyonder! Combining our Tingen City and the suburbs, there are hundreds of thousands of people or maybe even more. Yet, there are only about thirty plus Beyonders. Well, it's just my guess… I'm not counting the cultists and dark warlocks who hide in the dark…"

Without waiting for Klein's reply, she seemed to regain her vibrancy as she clenched her fist and brought it to her chest.

"And among these thirty plus Beyonders, most of them are at Sequence 9! Uh, it seems I have gone off topic…"

"It's okay. That was something I wanted to know as well." Klein wished that Rozanne could be like her usual self, revealing more information as she rambled on.

"Anyways, it's already very, very impressive to become a Beyonder!" Rozanne repeated herself. "The starting Sequence of our Church's complete Sequence is Sleepless: Sequence 9, Sleepless!"

Indeed… Klein nodded as he watched Rozanne finding it hard to stop herself from describing in detail.

"You should be able to guess from the name. A Sleepless is someone who does not need to sleep at night. Three to four hours of rest in the day would be sufficient. Man, I'm so envious… No, not at all! Sleep is a gift bestowed upon us by the Goddess. It's the truest bliss!

"Where was I? Ah, right. A Sleepless can see through the darkness

even without any lights. The deeper into the night, the more powerful they become. I mean more powerful in the aspects of their physical strength, their intuition, and their mental capabilities. However, although they can detect unknown dangers that lurk in the dark, they will still rely on demon hunting bullets and other items to handle monsters they are unable to deal with via normal means. My father was once a Sleepless."

Without waiting for Klein to press on, Rozanne continued, "After that, it's Sequence 8 Midnight Poet, and one level higher is Sequence 7 Nightmare."

Nightmare? Klein instantly recalled that Dunn Smith had guided his dreams. He asked as a confirmation, "Captain?"

"You know about it?" Rozanne's mouth nearly turned into an "O" shape.

"Captain once entered my dream…" Klein glanced around as he lowered his voice once more.

"Got it…" Rozanne was enlightened as she answered with a whisper.

She picked up a coffee cup beside her and took a sip before saying wistfully, "There are only two Sequence 7 Beyonders in our Tingen City's Church. It's likely that Captain is one of them. Even if he goes to a large diocese like Backlund, he is still an impressive figure. Some deacons might not even be stronger than he is!"

"So Captain is that impressive." Klein echoed with a smile.

Frankly, Dunn Smith's appearance last night had left a deep impression on him. He had basically believed that Dunn was an extremely powerful Beyonder.

"Of course!" Rozanne proudly straightened her back.

In moments, the scatterbrained her said with a vexed expression, "As for what's above Sequence 7, I have no idea. Among all the Nighthawks, perhaps only Captain will know."

"Then what about other starting Sequences? The ones that aren't

complete?" Klein was satisfied as he changed the subject.

It had to be said that Rozanne's description of Sleepless did match his imaginations and expectations of Beyonders. However, it was not the kind he wished to become. The perfect Sequence 9 was likely one that could study and grasp more knowledge of the mystery. By doing so, he could leverage on them to figure out the reason for his transmigration and lay the foundations of his future transmigration back.

Rozanne thought for a moment before saying with a sigh, "I'm not that interested in this aspect. I only know we have more than other churches. After all, the Goddess is the Mother of Concealment… Well, there should be two or three. Some of our teammates are cold and distant, making me fear them. They also have a strange smell to them. Some members… Well, I mean you should talk to Old Neil. He knows a lot, as well as quite a number of interesting magical rituals. Let me think. He once mentioned his Sequence 9 title, which is also the name of the potion formula… Ah, yes, it's called Mystery Pryer."

Quite a number of interesting magical rituals? Mystery Pryer sounds very close to what I want… Klein was slightly delighted.

"In addition, I also know of the name of a Sequence 7, the kind that's incomplete!" Rozanne said with a flaunting tone. She had just thought of it while recollecting.

"What is it?" Klein was abnormally curious.

In a world where High-Sequence Beyonders were scarce to the point of them possibly not existing, Sequence 7 was probably considered quite a potent force in the Church.

Rozanne revealed a sweet smile as she replied smugly, "Spirit Medium!"

"Ma'am Daly?" asked Klein subconsciously.

After his initial surprise, he realized that it was nothing unexpected. Only a Sequence 7 Beyonder could achieve such an impressive performance as a medium!

Rozanne's eyes widened once again as she said in disbelief, "H-how do you know of that too?"

"I've met Ma'am Daly." Klein did not hide the matter.

"Alright," said Rozanne with an envious tone. "If I can become a Spirit Medium, one just like Ma'am Daly, then I'll be willing to be a Beyonder. No, I'll consider it carefully for ten minutes…"

"Yes, Ma'am Daly fulfills all my imaginations as a Beyonder," echoed Klein in a slightly exaggerated manner.

Having fulfilled his goals, he chatted idly with Rozanne for a few minutes until he realized he was not getting any new information. He took off his hat and bowed before leaving.

As he walked down the stairs, Klein suddenly stopped after taking a few steps. He reached out to pat the notes in his inner pocket.

Immediately following that, he took out the notes worth twelve gold pounds and clenched them tightly in his left palm. Then, he reached his hand into his pocket and refused to release or pull them out again. Without realizing it, a smile appeared on his face.

According to the customs of the Foodaholic Empire—China—a treat to dinner was in order after earning money!

It's time to give Melissa a treat tonight

23: Side Arm

As Klein walked down Zouteland and while taking in the warm, humid breeze, he suddenly realized something.

He only had three pence of change. If he returned to Iron Cross Street via public carriage, it would cost him four pence. If he were to hand over a one-gold pound note, it would be akin to using a hundred-dollar bill to buy a bottle of cheap mineral water back on Earth. There was nothing wrong with that, but it was just quite awkward to do so.

Should I use three pence to travel three kilometers and walk the rest of the journey? Klein reached into his pocket with one hand as he slowed down his pace, considering other solutions.

That won't do! Soon, he rejected the idea.

It would take him a while to walk the remaining journey. Considering how he was carrying twelve pounds—a massive fortune—it was not safe!

Furthermore, he had deliberately not brought the revolver with him, afraid that the Nighthawks would confiscate it. If he were to encounter the danger that instigated Welch's death, there was no way he could fight back!

Get some change from a nearby bank? No, no way! There's a 0.5% processing fee. That's way too extravagant! Klein shook his head silently. Just the thought of the fees involved pained his heart!

Having ruled out one solution after another, Klein's eyes suddenly lit up when he saw a clothing shop in front of him!

That's right! Wouldn't the normal course of action be to buy something appropriately priced to get some change? A formal suit, shirt, vest, trousers, leather boots, and a cane were all within budget. They had to be bought sooner or later!

Oh, it's very troublesome when fitting clothes. Besides, Benson knows more about this than me and he's better at bargaining. I should consider it only after he's back… Then should I buy a cane? That's right! As the saying goes, a cane is a gentleman's best choice of defense. It is half as good as a crowbar. A gun in one hand and a cane in the other is the combat style of a civilized person! After debating internally, Klein made up his mind. He turned around and entered the clothing shop, Wilker Clothing and Hats.

The clothing store's layout resembled the clothing stores on Earth. The left wall was filled with rows of formal attires. The middle rows were decked with things like shirts, trousers, vests, and bowties. On the right were leather shoes and boots placed inside glass cabinets.

"Sir, may I help you?" A male salesperson dressed in a white shirt and red vest came over and asked politely.

In Loen Kingdom, rich and powerful gentlemen of high standing enjoyed wearing black suits consisting of white shirts matched with black vests and trousers. Their colors were relatively monotonous, so they required their male servants, salespeople, and service attendants to dress more brightly and colorfully, in order to distinguish themselves from their masters.

In contrast, ladies and mistresses wore dresses of all kinds in glamorous fashions. As such, maidservants would wear black and white.

Klein thought for a moment before answering the male salesperson's question. "A cane. Something that's heavy and hard."

The kind that can crack the skulls of others! The red-vested salesperson sized up Klein furtively before leading him into the store. He then pointed at a row of canes in the corner. "That cane inlaid with gold is made of Ironheart wood. It's both very heavy and hard, and costs eleven soli seven pence. Do you want to give it a try?"

Eleven soli seven pence? Why don't you go rob a bank! Big deal with the gold inlay! Klein was shocked by the price.

With an unperturbed expression, he nodded gently. "Alright."

The salesperson took down the Ironheart wood cane and carefully handed it to Klein, seemingly afraid that Klein would drop and break the merchandise.

Klein took the cane and found it heavy. He tried moving with it and discovered that he could not sway it smoothly as he wanted.

"It's too heavy." Klein shook his head in relief.

This is not an excuse! The salesperson took back the cane and pointed at another three canes.

"This is made of walnut wood, created by Tingen's most famous cane artisan, Mr. Hayes. It's priced at ten soli three pence… This is made of ebony wood and inlaid with silver. It's as hard as iron, costing seven soli six pence… This is made from the core of a white boli tree and also inlaid with silver, costing seven soli ten pence…"

Klein tried each one of them and found them of appropriate weight. He then tapped them with his fingers to gain an understanding of their hardness. Finally, he chose the cheapest one.

"I'll take the one made from ebony wood." Klein pointed at the cane with the silver inlay which the salesperson was holding.

"No problem, Sir. Please follow me to proceed with the payment. In the future, if this cane is scuffed or stained, you can hand it to us for handling for free." The salesperson led Klein to the counter.

Klein took the opportunity to release the four gold-pound notes from his tight grip and removed two of the smaller denominations.

"Good day, Sir. It will be seven soli six pence." The cashier behind the counter greeted with a smile.

Klein was planning on maintaining his gentlemanly image, but when he extended his hand with the one-gold pound note, he could not

help but ask, "Can I get a discount?"

"Sir, what we have is all hand-crafted, so our costs are very high." the salesperson beside him answered. "Since our boss isn't here, we are unable to lower the prices."

The cashier behind the counter added, "Sir, sorry about that."

"Alright." Klein handed the note over and received the black silver-inlaid cane.

While waiting for the change to be given to him, he took a few steps back and distanced himself from them. He swung around his side arm as a test.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!

The wind sounded heavy when the cane sliced through the air. Klein nodded in satisfaction.

He looked forward again, prepared to see notes and coins, but was appalled to see the red-vested salesperson retreating far away. The cashier behind the counter had retracted into a corner, leaning close to a double-barreled shotgun hanging to the wall.

The Loen Kingdom had a semi-regulated policy on firearms. To possess a firearm, one needed to apply for an all-purpose weapon permit or a hunter's license. Regardless of permit type, possession of restricted military firearms such as repeaters, steam-pressured guns, or six-barrel machine guns was forbidden.

An all-purpose weapon permit could be used to purchase or store any kind of civilian firearm, but earning the certificate was extremely troublesome. Even merchants of substantial standing might not be approved. A hunter's license was relatively easy. Even farmers in the suburbs could receive approval. However, the license was limited to hunting guns with restricted numbers. People with sizable assets would tend to apply for one to use it for self-defense in emergency situations, such as now…

Klein looked at the two wary salespeople as the corners of his mouth twitched. He chuckled dryly. "Not bad. This cane is perfect for

swinging. I'm very pleased."

Realizing that he had no intention to assault them, the cashier behind the counter relaxed. He handed over the notes and coins he had taken out with both hands.

Klein took a look at what he received and saw two five-soli notes, two one-soli notes, a five-pence coin, and a one-penny coin. He could not help but nod inwardly.

After a two-second pause, he ignored the way the salespeople looked at him and unfurled the four notes towards the light to ensure that the anti-counterfeit watermarks were present.

Klein put away the notes and coins when he was done. With the cane in hand, he tipped his hat and walked out of Wilker Clothing and Hats. He extravagantly spent six pence by taking a short-distance trackless carriage before transferring and reached home safe and sound.

After closing the door, he counted the eleven pounds and twelve soli notes thrice before placing them into the desk drawer. He then found the bronze revolver with the wooden grip.

Clink! Clang! Five brass bullets fell onto the table when Klein inserted the silver demon hunting bullets which had complicated patterns and the Dark Sacred Emblem into the revolver's cylinder.

Like before, he only inserted five rounds and left an empty spot to prevent any misfires. The remaining rounds were placed together with the five ordinary bullets in a small iron case.

Pa! He snapped the cylinder in place, giving him a sense of security.

He excitedly lodged the revolver into the holster at his armpit and buckled it securely. Then, he repeatedly practiced unbuckling and drawing the gun. He rested whenever his arms ached, and this continued until sunset when he heard the sounds of tenants walking along the corridor outside.

Phew! Klein let out a foul breath before putting his revolver back into his underarm holster.

Only then did he take off his formal suit and vest. He wore back his usual brownish-yellow coat and swung his arms to relax them.

Tap. Tap. Tap. He heard the sound of nearing footsteps before the twisting sound of an inserted key.

Melissa with her soft, black hair entered. Her nose twitched a little as she swept her gaze towards the unlit stove. The luster in her eyes dimmed slightly.

"Klein, I'll heat up the leftovers from last night. Benson will likely be home tomorrow." Melissa turned to look at her brother.

Klein had his hands in his pocket as he leaned against the edge of the desk. He smiled and said, "No, let's eat out."

"Eat out?" Melissa questioned in surprise.

"How does Silver Crown Restaurant at Daffodil Street sound? I heard they serve delicious food," suggested Klein.

"B-but…" Melissa was still confused.

Klein grinned and said, "To celebrate my new job."

"You found a job?" Melissa's voice rose unknowingly, "B-but, isn't the Tingen University interview tomorrow?"

"Another job." Klein gave a faint smile before fishing the stacked notes from the drawer. "They even gave me an advance of four weeks' pay."

Melissa looked at the gold pounds and soli as she widened her eyes.

"Goddess… You- they- what job did you get?"

Well… Klein's expression froze as he deliberated on his words.

"A security company whose mission is to seek, collect, and protect ancient relics. They were in need of a professional consultant. It's a five-year contract, earning me three pounds a week."

"Were you vexing over this last night?" asked Melissa after a moment of silence.

Klein nodded. "Yes, although being an academic at Tingen University is respectable, I prefer this job."

"Well, it isn't bad either." Melissa gave an encouraging smile. She asked half-suspiciously and half-curiously, "Why would they give you an advance payment of four full weeks?"

"It's because we need to move. We need a place with more rooms and a bathroom that belongs to us," said Klein while grinning and shrugging.

He felt that his smile was impeccable, just short of the word: "Surprised?"

Melissa was stunned momentarily before she suddenly spoke out in a fluster, "Klein, we are living quite well now. My occasional grumblings of not having a personal bathroom is just a habit. Do you remember Jenny? She lived next door to us, but ever since her father was injured and lost his job, they had no choice but to move to Lower Street. The family of five ended up staying in one room, with three of them sleeping in a bunk bed and two of them sleeping on the ground. They even wish to rent the remaining empty spot to someone…

"Compared to them, we are really very lucky. Don't waste your salary on this matter. Besides, I love Mrs. Smyrin's bakery."

Sis, why is your reaction completely different from how it played out in my head… Klein's expression went blank when he heard his sister.

24: Penny-pincher

The sky outside was gradually dyed golden as Klein looked into Melissa's eyes. He was momentarily at a loss for words; none of the lines he prepared could be used.

He coughed lightly twice as he quickly racked his brains.

"Melissa, this isn't a waste of salary. In the future, my colleagues, as well as Benson's colleagues might visit. Are we going to host them in such a place? When Benson and I get married and have wives, are we still going to sleep in bunk beds?"

"None of you have fiancées yet, right? We can wait a little while and save up more money in the meantime," answered Melissa in a logically concise manner.

"No, Melissa. This is a societal rule." Klein was stumped and could only count on lofty principles. "Since I'm earning three pounds a week, I should look like I'm earning three pounds a week."

To be honest, having rented an apartment before with others, Zhou Mingrui was no stranger to his present living conditions as Klein. He was very used to it, but it was because of his past experience that he knew how inconvenient such an environment was for a girl. Furthermore, his goal was to become a Beyonder and study mysticism to find his way home. In the future, he was bound to conduct some magical rituals at home. Having too many people in the apartment building made incidents prone to happen.

Klein saw that Melissa was about to continue arguing, and hurriedly added, "Don't worry. I'm not planning to get a bungalow, but probably a terrace. Basically, it has to have a bathroom we can call

ours. Also, I like Mrs. Smyrin's bread, Tingen biscuits, and lemon cakes too. We can first consider places near Iron Cross Street and Daffodil Street."

Melissa pouted her lips slightly and fell silent for a moment before nodding slowly.

"Besides, I'm in no rush to move either. We have to wait for Benson to return," said Klein with a chuckle. "We can't have him be shocked when he opens the door to find nothing, right? Imagine him saying in astonishment—'Where are my things? Where are my siblings? Where's my home? Is this my home? Did I make a mistake? Goddess, wake me up if this is a dream. Why is my home gone after a few days of absence!?'"

His mimicking of Benson's tone made Melissa involuntarily smile as her eyes scrunched up and revealed her shallow dimples.

"No, Mr. Franky would definitely be waiting by the door to get Benson to hand over the apartment keys. Benson wouldn't even be able to come up." The girl disparaged the miserly landlord.

In the Moretti household, all of them would like to make Mr. Franky the butt of their jokes for every trivial and major matter. It was all thanks to Benson who initiated this practice.

"Right, there's no way he would switch locks for the tenants after us," Klein echoed with a smile. He pointed at the door and quipped, "Miss Melissa, shall we head to Silver Crown Restaurant for a celebration?"

Melissa sighed gently and said, "Klein, do you know Selena? My classmate and my good friend?"

Selena? An image of a girl with wine-red hair and deep brown eyes surfaced in Klein's mind. Her parents were Evernight Goddess believers. They had named her after St. Selena as a blessing. She was not yet sixteen, and was half a year younger than Melissa. She was a happy, cheerful, and outgoing lady.

"Yes." Klein nodded in affirmation.

"Her elder brother, Chris, is a lawyer. He currently earns close to

three pounds a week as well. His fiancée works part time as a typist," described Melissa. "They have been engaged for more than four years. To ensure a decent and stable life after marriage, they are still saving money to this very day. They have yet to go down the wedding aisle and plan to wait for at least another year. According to Selena, there are many people like her brother. They typically get married after twenty-eight. You have to make advanced preparations and save up. Don't squander your money."

It's just a meal at a restaurant. Is there a need to preach at me… Klein was rendered at a loss whether to laugh or cry. After a few seconds of thought, he said, "Melissa, I'm already earning three pounds a week, and I'll have increments every year. There's no need for you to worry."

"But we need to save some money in the case of any unexpected emergencies. For example, what if that security company suddenly closes down? I have a classmate whose father's company went bankrupt. He had to find temporary work at the pier and their living conditions turned terrible instantly. She had no choice but to quit school," advised Melissa with a serious expression.

"…" Klein extended his hand to cover his face. "T-that security company and the government… Yes, it has some connections with the government. It will not easily close down."

"But even the government isn't stable. After every election, if the party in power changes, many people will have their positions stripped off. It turns into a mess." Melissa retorted in an unyielding manner.

…Sis, you sure know a lot… Klein found the humor in his exasperation as he shook his head. "Alright then…

"Then I'll boil some soup with the leftovers from yesterday. Buy some pan-fried fish, a slab of black-pepper beef, a small bottle of butter, and a cup of malt beer for me. Anyway, there should still be some celebration."

They were commonly-sold items by hawkers on Iron Cross Street. A piece of pan-fried fish was six to eight pence; a not-so-big piece of

black-peppered beef was five pence; a cup of malt beer was a penny; and a bottle of butter weighing about a quarter pound was four pence, but buying a pound of butter would only cost one soli three pence.

The original Klein was responsible for buying ingredients during holidays, so he was no stranger to the prices. Klein did a mental estimate that Melissa would need about one soli six pence. Therefore, he took out two one-soli notes.

"Alright." Melissa did not object to Klein's proposal. She put down her backpack of stationery and took the notes.

When he saw his sister taking out a tiny bottle for the butter and pots for the other food before briskly walking to the door, Klein thought for a moment and shouted out to her. "Melissa, use the remaining money to buy some fruits."

There were many hawkers on Iron Cross Street who would buy low-quality or expiring fruits from other places. The residents were not outraged about this because the prices were extremely cheap. They could taste the magnificent flavors after removing the rotten parts, so it was a cheap enjoyment.

With that said, Klein took a few brisk steps forward and took out the remaining copper pennies from his pocket and stuffed it into his sister's palm.

"Ah?" Melissa's brown eyes looked at her brother in puzzlement.

Klein took two steps back and smiled. "Remember to go to Mrs. Smyrin's. Reward yourself with a tiny lemon cake."

"…" Melissa's mouth widened as she blinked. Finally, she said a single word, "Okay."

She quickly turned around, opened the door, and ran toward the stairwell.

…

A river tore through the land, with cedar and maple trees lining the

banks; the air so fresh, it was intoxicating.

Klein, who was here to put closure to his interview, had his revolver with him. He held his cane and paid six pence for the public carriage. He walked down a cemented path and approached a three-story stone building which was shaded by greenery. It was Tingen University's administrative block.

"It's truly worthy of being one of the two major universities of the Loen Kingdom…" With this being his first time here, Klein sighed as he walked.

Compared to Tingen University, Khoy University right across the river could only be described as shabby.

"Heave-ho!"

"Heave-ho!"

Voices approached slowly as two rowing boats made their way upstream across the Khoy River. Oars were being rowed in an orderly and rhythmic manner.

This was a rowing sport that was popular among all the universities in the Loen Kingdom. With Klein requiring a scholarship to finance his university studies, he, Welch, and the others had joined Khoy University's rowing club and were pretty good at it.

"This is youth…" Klein stopped and looked into the distance before sighing wistfully.

Such sights would no longer be seen in another week since school would break for summer.

As he proceeded down a road sheltered by trees, Klein stopped by a three-story stone building. He entered after successfully registering himself and easily found his way to the office of the person who had tended to him the other time.

Knock! Knock! Knock! He knocked lightly on the half-closed door.

"Come in." A man's voice sounded from inside.

A middle-aged instructor dressed in a white shirt and black tuxedo frowned when he saw Klein enter. "There's another hour until the interview."

"Mr. Stone, do you still remember me? I'm a student of Senior Associate Professor Cohen, Klein Moretti. You have read my recommendation letter before." Klein smiled as he took off his hat.

Harvin Stone stroked his black beard and asked, puzzled, "Is there something wrong? I'm not in charge of interviews."

"Here's the situation. I've already found a job, so I won't be participating in the interview today." Klein gave his reason for coming.

"I see…" When Harvin Stone learned of the reason, he stood up and reached out his right hand. "Congratulations. You are really a polite lad. I will inform the professor and senior associate professors."

Klein shook Harvin's hand and planned on making a little small talk before bidding him farewell when he heard a familiar voice behind him.

"Moretti, you found another job?"

Klein turned around and saw an elder with a head of silver hair that left a deep impression on his silhouette. His deep, blue eyes sunk deep into his face and he had few wrinkles. The man looked sharp in his black tuxedo.

"Good afternoon, Mentor. Mr. Azik," he hurriedly greeted. "Why are the two of you here?"

The elder was none other than Mr. Quentin Cohen, a Senior Associate Professor of Khoy University's history department, who was also his mentor. Beside Cohen was a middle-aged man with bronze-colored skin of average build. He did not have any facial hair and held a newspaper in his hand. His hair was black and his pupils brown. His facial features were soft as his eyes revealed an indescribable sense of weariness like it had seen the vicissitudes of life. Beneath his right ear was a black mole which could only be seen if looked at carefully.

Klein recognized him since he was Khoy University's history department lecturer, Mr. Azik, who often helped the original Klein. He enjoyed debating with his mentor, Senior Associate Professor Cohen. They often had a clash of opinion, but even so, they were best friends; otherwise, they would not have enjoyed meeting up for a chat.

Cohen nodded and said with a relaxed tone, "Azik and I are here to participate in an academic conference. What kind of job did you get?"

"It's a security company which seeks, collects, and protects ancient relics. They were in need of a professional consultant and are paying me three pounds a week." Klein repeated what he said to his sister yesterday. Following that, he explained, "As you know, I prefer exploring history, instead of summarizing it."

Cohen nodded slightly and said, "Everyone has their own choices. I'm very happy that you bothered to come to Tingen University to inform them instead of just not showing up."

At that moment, Azik interjected, "Klein, do you know what happened to Welch and Naya? I read in the newspapers that they were killed by burglars."

The incident has become a case of armed burglary? And why is it already in the newspapers? Klein was taken aback as he weighed over his words.

"I'm not very clear about the specifics as well. Welch had obtained a diary of the Solomon Empire's Antigonus family from the Fourth Epoch. He sought my help in interpreting it. I helped them for the first few days, but I later got busy with job hunting. The police even came to me two days ago."

He deliberately divulged the matter regarding the Solomon Empire and the Antigonus family in hopes of getting any information from the two history teachers.

"The Fourth Epoch…" Cohen muttered with a frown.

The bronze-skinned and weary eyes of Azik went blank first before he

inhaled. He rubbed his temple with his newspaper-wielding left hand and said, "Antigonus… rings a bell… But why can't I remember…"<

25: Cathedral

While Azik muttered to himself, he subconsciously shot a glance at Quentin Cohen, seemingly hoping for hints to jolt his memories.

Cohen, with his deep set blue eyes, shook his head without any hesitation. "I do not have any impression of it."

"…Alright then. Perhaps, it just shares a root word." Azik lowered his left hand and gave a self-deprecating laugh.

Klein was rather disappointed with the outcome, and he could not help but add on. "Mentor, Mr. Azik, as both of you know, I'm very interested in exploring and restoring the history of the Fourth Epoch. If you ever recall anything or obtain relevant information, could you please write to me?"

"No problem." As a result of Klein's actions today, the silver-haired Senior Associate Professor was rather pleased with him.

Azik also nodded and said, "Is your address still the same as before?"

"For now, but I'll be moving soon. I'll write a letter to inform you when the time comes," replied Klein in a respectful manner.

Cohen shook his black cane and said, "It's indeed about time you moved to a place with a better environment."

At that moment, Klein caught a glance at the newspaper in Azik's hand. He deliberated on his words before saying, "Mentor, Mr. Azik, what did the newspapers say regarding Welch and Naya? I only learned a little from the police who were in charge of the investigations."

Azik was just about to answer when Cohen suddenly pulled out the pocket watch that was linked to his black tuxedo by a golden chain.

Click! He opened the pocket watch and tapped his cane.

"The meeting is about to begin. Azik, we can't be delayed any further. Give the newspaper to Moretti."

"Alright." Azik handed over the newspaper he had read to Klein. "We will be going upstairs. Remember to write a letter. Our address has yet to change; it's still the Khoy University History Department Office. Haha."

He laughed as he turned around and left the room with Cohen.

Klein took off his hat and bowed. After watching the two gentlemen leave, he bade farewell to the owner of the office, Harvin Stone. He proceeded across the corridor and slowly exited the gray three-story building.

With his back against the sun, he lifted up his cane and unfolded the newspaper and saw the title: "Tingen Morning Post."

Tingen sure has all sorts of newspapers and magazines… There is the Morning Post, Evening Post, the Honest Paper, Backlund Daily Tribune, Tussock Times, family magazines and book reviews… Klein casually recalled the several names that surfaced in his mind. Of course, a number of them were not local. They were distributed via steam locomotives.

Now that the papermaking and printing industries were getting more advanced, the cost of a newspaper has already decreased to the price of a penny. The audience it reached also grew wider and wider.

Klein did not scrutinize the details of the newspaper, quickly flipping to the News section with the report "Armed Burglary Murder."

"…According to the police department, the scene at Mr. Welch's home was a horrible sight. There was missing gold, jewelry, and money, as well as anything valuable that could be easily taken away. Not even a penny was left behind. There is reason to believe that this was done by a merciless group of criminals that would not hesitate to

kill the innocent, such as Mister Welch and Madam Naya, once sight of their faces were caught."

"This is outright contempt for our kingdom's laws! This is a challenge to public security! No one wishes to have such an encounter! Of course, one piece of good news is that the police have located the murderer and captured the main culprit. We will do our best to provide news on any follow-ups."

"Reporter: John Browning."

The matter has been handled and covered up… As Klein walked through the boulevard, he nodded in a hardly noticeable manner.

He flipped through the newspaper as he strolled down the path, reading the other news articles and serials in the process.

Suddenly, he felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand, as though needles were stabbing at him.

Someone is watching me? Observing me? Monitoring me? Various thoughts welled up in him as Klein had a faint realization.

Back on Earth, he had once felt an invisible gaze before ultimately discovering the source of the gaze. However, it had never felt as crystal clear as what he was experiencing now!

This was the same in the original Klein's memory fragments!

Was it the transmigration or the mysterious luck enhancement ritual which enhanced my sixth sense? Klein fought back the urge to seek out the observer. Using his knowledge from reading novels and watching movies, he slowed his pace and put away the newspaper before looking toward Khoy River.

Following that, he acted as if he was admiring the scenery, slowly turning his head in different directions. He acted natural as he turned around, taking in everything with his eyes.

Other than the trees, grassy plains, and students passing by in the distance, there was no other person there.

But Klein was certain that someone was watching him!

Wh— Klein's heart raced as his blood surged through his body with the intense thumping.

He unfolded the papers and covered half his face, afraid that anyone would discover anything wrong with his expression.

Meanwhile, he clenched his cane and readied himself to draw his gun.

One step. Two steps. Three steps. Klein proceeded forward slowly.

The feeling of being spied upon remained, but there was no sudden outburst of danger.

He walked through the boulevard in a somewhat stiff manner and arrived at the waiting point for public carriages when a carriage pulled up coincidentally.

"Iron… Zoute… No, Champagne Street." Klein continually dismissed his thoughts.

He originally planned on heading home immediately, but he was afraid of leading an observer of unknown motives to his apartment. Following that, he thought of heading to Zouteland Street to seek help from the Nighthawks or his colleagues. However, he thought otherwise, afraid that he would end up alerting his enemy and expose the Nighthawks. Therefore, he casually chose somewhere else.

"Six pence," the ticketing officer replied routinely.

Klein did not bring any gold pounds with him today. He had hidden the money in the usual spot and had only taken two soli notes with him. And before he came, he had spent the same amount of money, leaving him with one soli six pence. Therefore, he took out all his coins and handed them to the ticketing officer.

He found a seat after boarding the carriage, and finally with the closing of the carriage doors, Klein felt that unease of being watched vanish!

He exhaled slowly as he felt his limbs tingle slightly.

What do I do?

What should I do next? Klein looked out the carriage as he racked his brains for a solution.

Until he was clear about the intentions of the person watching him, Klein had to assume that there was malicious intent!

Many thoughts sprang up in his mind, but he dismissed them. He had never experienced such an event, and had to use a few minutes to organize his ideas.

He had to notify the Nighthawks; only they could truly get rid of this threat!

But I can't head there directly or I might expose them. Perhaps, that might be their goal…

Following this train of thought, Klein crudely surmised various possibilities as his thoughts turned clearer.

Fffffff! He exhaled as he regained some semblance of composure. He looked seriously at the scenery outside flying past him.

There were no accidents along the way to Champagne Street, but when Klein opened the door and stepped out of the car, he immediately had the uneasy feeling of being watched again!

He acted as though he had not sensed anything. He took the newspaper and his cane, slowly making his way in the direction of Zouteland Street.

But he did not enter that street. Instead, he took another route to the Red Moonlight Street behind. There was a beautiful white plaza there, as well as a large cathedral with a pointy roof!

Saint Selena Cathedral!

The Tingen headquarters of the Church of Evernight!

As a believer, there was nothing odd about him participating in Mass or praying on his day off.

The cathedral exhibited a design similar to Earth's Gothic style. It also had a tall, black, and imposing clock tower, situated between blue and red checkered windows.

Klein stepped into the cathedral and followed an aisle into the prayer hall. Along the way, the stained windows were composed of red and blue glass patterns that allowed colored light to shine into the hall. The blue was closer to black, the red the same color as the crimson moon. It made the surroundings seem unusually dark and mysterious.

The feeling of being watched vanished. Klein acted unfazed as he walked toward the open prayer hall.

There were no high windows here. The deep darkness was emphasized, but behind the arc-shaped holy altar, on the wall directly opposite the door, were about twenty circular fist-sized holes that allowed the radiant sunlight to enter the hall.

It was akin to pedestrians seeing the starry sky when suddenly looking up into the dark night to see the shimmering stars in all their nobility, purity, and holiness.

Even though Klein had always believed that gods could be analyzed and understood, he could not help but lower his head here.

The bishop was preaching in a gentle tone as Klein silently made his way down the aisle that split the pews into two columns. He searched for an empty area close to the passageway before slowly taking a seat.

Leaning his cane onto the back of the pew in front of him, Klein took off his hat and placed it onto his lap together with the newspaper. Then he clasped his hands together and lowered his head.

The entire process was done slowly and routinely as though he was really there to pray.

Klein closed his eyes as he silently listened to the bishop's voice in the darkness.

"Lacking clothes and food, they have no covering in the cold.

"They are drenched by rains, and huddle around the rocks for lack of shelter.

"They are orphans snatched from the breast, hope lost on them; they are the poor that have been forced off the proper path.

"The Evernight did not forsake them, but bestowed them with love[1]."

…

Echoes amplified as they entered his ear. Klein saw a swath of darkness in front of him as he felt his spirit and mind cleansed.

He calmly took it in until the bishop finished his preachings and ended Mass.

After which, the bishop opened a confessional door beside him. Men and women began lining up.

Klein opened his eyes and donned his hat once more. With his cane and newspaper, he stood up and found his place in line.

It was his turn after more than twenty minutes.

He stepped in and closed the door behind him. There was darkness in front of him.

"My child, what do you wish to say?" The bishop's voice sounded from behind the wooden damper screen.

Klein took out the 'Seventh Unit, Special Operations Department' badge from his pocket and handed it over to the bishop through an opening.

"Someone is tailing me. I wish to find Dunn Smith." As though he had been infected by the silent darkness, his tone turned softer as well.

The bishop took the badge and after a few seconds of silence, he said, "Turn right from the confession booth and walk to the end. There will be a secret door to the side. Someone will lead the way after you

enter."

As he spoke, he pulled a rope inside the room, causing a particular priest to hear a chime.

Klein retrieved his badge and took off his hat and pressed it to his chest. He gave a slight bow before turning around and exiting.

After confirming that the feeling of being watched was gone, he wore his half top hat. Without any excessive emotions, he held his cane and turned right, until he arrived by an arched altar.

He found the secret door in the wall facing his side. He silently opened it before sneaking in quickly.

The secret door closed silently as a middle-aged, black-robed priest appeared under the illumination of gas lamps.

"What is it?" the priest asked tersely.

Klein showed his badge and repeated what he said to the bishop.

The middle-aged priest did not ask further questions. He turned around and proceeded forward in silence.

Klein nodded and took off his hat. With his black cane, he followed silently in tow.

Rozanne had once mentioned that heading left from the crossroads towards Chanis Gate would reach Saint Selena Cathedral.

1. Adapted from Job 24:8, Old Testament.

26: Practice

Tap! Tap! Tap! The sound of footsteps echoed through the dark, narrow corridor, which was otherwise silent.

Klein kept his back straight as he kept up with the priest's pace. He did not pose questions or chat idly with him, remaining silent like a windless body of water.

After passing through the heavily guarded passageway, the priest opened a secret door with a key and pointed down a stairwell made of stone. "Turn left at the intersection to reach Chanis Gate."

"May Goddess bless you." Klein gestured the sign of the crimson moon on his chest.

Commoners practiced etiquette, while the religious partook in ritual blessings.

"Praise the Lady." The priest returned with the same gesture.

Klein did not speak further as he walked down the dark stone stairwell with the aid of the refined inlaid gas lamps on both sides of the wall.

Midway, he subconsciously turned back and saw the priest standing at the entrance. He was in the shadows and appeared like an immobile wax statue.

Klein looked away and continued to proceed down. It did not take long before he hit ground laid with ice-cold stone slabs. This led him to the intersection.

He did not turn towards Chanis Gate because Dunn Smith, who had

recently finished his shift, was definitely not there.

He turned right and saw the familiar path. Klein went back up another flight of stairs and appeared inside Blackthorn Security Company.

Seeing doors that were tightly shut or half-closed, he did not rush into them. Instead, he went to the reception and saw a brown-haired girl focused on a magazine with a sweet smile.

"Hi, Rozanne." Klein came to her side and deliberately rapped the table.

Knock! Rozanne stood up suddenly and knocked over a chair and said in a fluster, "Hi, nice weather today. Y-you, Klein, why are you here?"

She patted her chest and heaved a few sighs of relief. She was like a young lady afraid that her father had caught her skiving.

"I need to find Captain," answered Klein simply.

"…You gave me a fright. I thought Captain came out." Rozanne glared at Klein. "Don't you know how to knock!? Hmph, you should be thankful that I'm a tolerant and kind woman. Well, I do prefer the term lady… Is there a reason why you are looking for Captain? He's in the room opposite Mrs. Orianna."

Even though he felt uptight, Klein was so amused by Rozanne he smiled. He pondered for a moment before saying, "A secret."

"…" Rozanne's eyes widened and while she reeled in her disbelief, Klein did a slight bow before bidding her farewell.

He went through the reception's partition and knocked on the door of the first office on the right.

"Come in." Dunn Smith's deep and gentle voice sounded.

Klein pushed the door and opened before closing the door behind him. He took off his hat and bowed. "Good morning, Captain."

"Good morning, how can I help you?" Dunn's black trench coat and

hat were hanging on a clothes stand to his side. He was dressed in a white shirt and black vest. Even though his hairline was rather high, his gray eyes were deep, and he appeared much fresher.

"Someone is following me." Klein honestly answered without any embellishments.

Dunn leaned back and clasped his hands together. His deep gray eyes silently looked at Klein's eyes. He did not follow up on the topic of being followed and instead, asked, "You came from the cathedral?"

"Yes." Klein answered.

Dunn nodded gently. He did not comment on its merits or demerits as he switched the subject back. "It might be that Welch's father doesn't believe the cause of death that we reported and had hired a private investigator from Wind City to investigate the matter."

Midseashire's Constant City was also known as Wind City. It was a region with extremely advanced coal and steel industries. It was one of the top three cities of the Loen Kingdom.

Before waiting for Klein to give his opinion, Dunn continued, "It might also be a result of that notebook. Heh, we happened to be investigating where Welch received the Antigonus family's notebook. Of course, we can't eliminate other people or organizations that might be seeking out this notebook."

"What should I do?" Klein asked in a serious voice.

Without a question, he hoped that it was the first reason.

Dunn did not immediately answer him. He raised his coffee mug and took a mouthful, his eyes not showing the sliver of a ripple. "Return the way you came, then do anything you wish."

"Anything?" Klein returned with a question.

"Anything." Dunn nodded with certainty. "Of course, do not scare them off or violate the law."

"Alright." Klein took a deep breath and bade him farewell. He left the

room and went back underground.

He turned left at the intersection, and bathed in the light from the gas lamps on the two walls, he arrived silently to the empty, dark, and cold passageway.

The sound of his footsteps echoed, making him sound more alone and terrified.

Soon, Klein arrived at the stairwell. He went forward and saw a shadow standing there—the middle-aged priest.

The two did not say a word when they met. The priest turned around in silence and made way.

He proceeded silently before returning to the prayer hall. The circular holes behind the arched altar were still as pure and bright, while the darkness and silence of the building's interior remained. There were still men and women lining outside the confessional, but much fewer than before.

After waiting for a moment, Klein slowly left the prayer hall with his cane and newspaper as though nothing had ever happened, successfully leaving Saint Selena Cathedral.

The moment he walked out, he saw the burning sun. He immediately regained the familiar feeling of being observed. He felt like he was prey being eyed by a hawk.

Suddenly, a question surfaced in his mind.

Why didn't the "observer" follow me into the cathedral? Although I could have still used the dark environment and the priest to conceal my temporary disappearance, would it be hard for him to continue monitoring me by pretending to pray? If he had not done something wrong, there would be no problem walking in with an open and aboveboard manner, right? Unless the person has some dark history, making him afraid of the Church or fear the bishop, knowing that he might have the powers of a Beyonder.

In that case, the likelihood of it being a private investigator is very slim… Klein exhaled and no longer acted as nervous as he was previously.

He took a casual stroll before going around and to the back of Zouteland Street.

He stopped at an ancient-styled building with mottled walls. The address on the door was '3.' Its name was the Zouteland Shooting Club.

Part of the police department's underground shooting range was opened to the public as a way to earn some additional funds.

Klein went in and the feeling of being watched vanished instantly. He took this opportunity to hand over his Special Operations Department badge to the attendant.

After a short verification, he was led underground to a small, confined shooting range.

"Ten-meter target." Klein informed the attendant simply. Next, he retrieved the revolver from his underarm holster and the box of brass bullets from his pocket.

The feeling of being suddenly targeted made his desire to protect himself win over his procrastination. Therefore, he could not wait to come over to practice his shooting.

Pa! After the attendant left, he flicked open the cylinder and removed the silver demon hunting bullets. Following that, he filled the cylinder with normal brass bullets.

This time, neither did he leave an empty spot to prevent misfiring, nor did he take off his formal attire and half top hat. He planned on practicing in his usual getup. After all, it was impossible for him to shout "wait a minute, let me change into something more comfortable" after encountering an enemy or danger.

Click! Klein closed the cylinder and rolled it with his thumb.

Suddenly, he held the gun in both hands, raised it up straight, and aimed at the target more than ten meters away.

However, he was in no hurry to shoot. Instead, he recalled his experience at military training[1], how to form a line with the iron-

sights, and knowledge about a gun's recoil.

Rustle! Rustle! While his clothes rustled, Klein repeated his aiming and his holding stance. He was as serious as a student taking a high-school exam.

After repeating it several times, he retreated to the wall and sat down on a long, soft bench. He placed the revolver to the side, began massaging his arms, and rested for quite a while.

He spent a few minutes recalling his practice before he picked up the revolver with the wooden handle and bronze cylinder. He got into standard firing position and pulled the trigger.

Bang! His arm trembled as his body moved back from the recoil. The bullet missed the target.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Drawing from the experience he gained, he shot again and again until all six rounds were finished.

I'm starting to hit the target… Klein stepped back and sat down again as he exhaled.

Click! He swung the cylinder out and allowed the six shells to fall to the ground. Then, without a change in expression, he inserted the remaining brass rounds in.

After relaxing his arm, Klein stood up again and returned to his shooting position.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Ringing shots echoed as the target shook. Klein practiced and rested repeatedly. He expended all thirty normal rounds and the remaining five from before. He gradually hit the target and started aiming for the bull's eye.

He swung his sore shoulders and threw out the final five shells. He lowered his head and inserted the demon hunting bullets with the complicated patterns back into the gun, leaving an empty spot to prevent misfiring.

After putting the revolver back into his underarm holster, Klein patted the dust from his body and walked out the shooting range to

return to the streets.

The feeling of being observed arose once again. Klein felt calmer than he previously felt as he slowly walked to Champagne Street. He spent four pence on a tracked carriage to return to Iron Cross Street before returning to his own apartment.

The feeling of being spied upon vanished without a trace. Klein took out his keys and opened the door to see a short-haired man nearing his thirties and wearing a linen shirt seated at a desk.

His heart tensed up before relaxing immediately. Klein greeted with a smile, "Good morning—no—good afternoon, Benson."

This man was none other than Klein's and Melissa's elder brother, Benson Moretti. He was only twenty-five this year, but his receding hairline and decrepit appearance made him look nearly thirty.

He had black hair and brown eyes, resembling Klein somewhat, but he lacked the faint scholarly air which Klein had.

"Good afternoon, Klein. How was the interview?" Benson stood up as he grinned.

His black coat and half top hat were hanging on a protrusion of their bunk bed.

"Horrible," Klein replied in a deadpan manner.

When he saw Benson stunned, Klein chuckled and added, "In fact, I didn't even participate in the interview. I found a job ahead of the interview and it pays three pounds a week…"

He repeated what he told Melissa again.

Benson's expression calmed down as he shook his head with a laugh. "It feels like I'm seeing a child grow up… Well, this job is pretty good." He sighed and said, "It's great that the first thing I heard is such good news after being away for work. Let's celebrate tonight and buy some beef?"

Klein smiled. "Sure, but I believe Melissa will feel the pinch. Let's buy

some ingredients later in the afternoon? Let's bring at least three soli? Well, to be honest, a pound exchanges for twenty soli, and one soli exchanges for twelve pence. There are even denominations like the halfpence and quarterpence. Such a coin system just goes against logic. It's so troublesome. I think it must be one of the most foolish coin systems in the world."

When he said that, he saw Benson's expression turn stern. Feeling a little unease, he wondered if he had said anything wrong.

Could it be that in the lost memory fragments of the original Klein, Benson was an outright, extreme nationalist who showed no tolerance for any negativity? Benson took a few steps and refuted him with a stern expression. "No, it is not one of, but *the* most foolish coin system."

Not one of! Klein was taken aback, but he quickly snapped to his senses. He looked his brother in the eye and laughed.

Indeed, Benson was great at mocking humor.

Benson lifted the corners of his lips and said in all seriousness, "You should understand that to institute a reasonable and simple coin system, one needs to know how to count and grasp the decimal system. Unfortunately, there are too few talents among those important figures."<

1. This does not mean Zhou Mingrui was a soldier. Students in China are made to attend short military stints during their schooling days for short periods of time.

27: Siblings' Dinner

It's simply sharp and incisive… Klein burst out in laughter. Using the rich experience he had from his previous incarnation, he added another insult. "In fact, there is no evidence to suggest that those important figures have any brains at all."

"Good! Very good!" Benson roared with laughter as he gave a thumbs up. "Klein, you are a lot more humorous than before."

After taking a breath, he continued, "I have to go to the pier in the afternoon. I'm only off work tomorrow. After that I'll have time… to go to Tingen City Housing Improvement Company with the both of you. Let's see if they have cheap and good terrace houses for rent. Also, I need to pay Mr. Franky a visit."

"Our landlord?" the perplexed Klein asked. *Does our current landlord have some terrace houses from pretty good districts under his name?*

Benson shot his brother a glance and said, amused, "Have you forgotten the one-year rental contract we have with him? It has only been six months."

"Hiss…" Klein immediately drew a gasp of cold air.

He had really forgotten the matter!

Although rent was paid once a week, the lease was a year long. If they were to move now, it was equivalent to a breach in contract. If they were taken to court, they would have to compensate large sums of money!

"You are still lacking in societal experience." Benson touched his receding black hairline and said wistfully, "This was a clause I fought

so hard back then. If not, Mr. Franky was only willing to lease it to us for three months each contract. To those with money, landlords would sign leases for a year, two years, or even three years to seek stable income. But for us—the past us—and our neighbors, landlords would have to be constantly worried that something bad might happen, depriving them of their rent. Therefore, they would only sign short-term contracts.

"In that case, they can offer to raise prices according to the situation." Klein summarized and added, using the original Klein's memories and his own experience as a tenant.

Benson sighed and said, "This is the cruel reality of today's society. Alright, you don't have to worry. The issue with the contract can be easily resolved. To be frank, even if we owe him a week's rent, Mr. Franky would have immediately thrown us out and confiscated whatever valuable items we have. After all, his intelligence is below that of a curly-haired baboon's. There's no way he can comprehend overly complicated matters."

Upon hearing this, Klein suddenly recalled a particular Sir Humphrey's meme. He shook his head and said seriously, "No, Benson. You are wrong."

"Why?" Benson was puzzled.

"Mr. Franky's intelligence is still slightly higher than a baboon's," Klein replied in all seriousness. Just as Benson seemed to smile in response, he added, "If he is in form."

"Haha." Benson lost it and burst out in laughter.

After a series of rapturous laughter, he pointed at Klein, momentarily unable to put his thoughts in words. Only then did he return to the topic at hand.

"Of course, as a gentleman, we cannot employ such shameless tactics. I will discuss this with Mr. Franky tomorrow. Believe me, he's easily convinced—*easily*."

Klein had no doubts regarding Benson's point. The existence of the

gas pipes was excellent proof.

After some idle chatter between the brothers, the remnants of pan-fried fish from the previous night were made into a soup with some vegetables. During the boiling process, the steam moistened the rye bread.

Smearing a little butter on the bread, Klein and Benson had a simple meal, but they were very satisfied with it. After all, the fragrance and sweetness of butter brought them endless aftertastes.

After Benson left, Klein headed to the Lettuce and Meat market with three soli notes and some spare pennies. He spent six pence on a pound of beef and seven pence on a fresh and succulent fish with few bones. Additionally, he bought potatoes, peas, radishes, rhubarbs, lettuce, and turnips, as well as spices such as rosemary, basil, cumin, and cooking oils.

During this entire time, he continued to feel like he was being watched, but there was no physical interaction.

After spending some time at Smyrin Bakery, Klein returned home and began weight-lifting with heavier items such as books to train his arm strength.

He had planned to exercise by military boxing, which he learned from his compulsory military stint for students. However, he had already forgotten the radio exercise routines from school, much less boxing which was only taught during the military stints. Exasperated, he could only do something simpler.

Klein did not overexert himself since it would lead to fatigue and thus put him in greater danger. He took an appropriate break and began reading the original Klein's notes and study material. He wished to read anything regarding the Fourth Epoch again.

…

In the evening, Benson and Melissa sat in front of a desk. The food was placed neatly like children in upper primary school.

The fragrances of the dishes were composed of a rich melody of

scents—the soul captivating fragrance of the stewed beef, the obviously tender potatoes, the sweetness of the thick pea soup, the mellow flavors of the stewed rhubarb, and the sweetness of the buttered rye bread.

Benson gulped a mouthful of saliva as he turned around to see Klein placing a crispy piece of fish onto a plate. He felt the fragrance of the oil permeate through his nostrils into his throat and then into his stomach.

Groan! His stomach made a distinct protest.

Klein rolled up his sleeves and held up a plate of fried fish before placing it in the middle of the tidied desk. Following that, he returned to the cupboard and took out two large cups of ginger beer and placed them where he and Benson sat.

He smiled at Melissa and took out a lemon pudding as if he were performing a magic trick. "We'll have beer, while you'll have this."

"…Thank you." Melissa took the lemon pudding.

When Benson saw this, he raised his cup and said with a smile, "This is to celebrate Klein's finding of a decent job."

Klein raised his cup and clinked it with Benson before clinking it with Melissa's lemon pudding. "Praise the Lady!"

Gulp. He tilted his head back and drank it down. The spicy feeling warmed his gullet, bringing him great aftertastes.

Despite its name, ginger beer did not contain any alcohol. It was a mixture of the ginger's spiciness and the sourness of lemon that made it taste similar to beer. It was a kind of beverage that both women and children found acceptable. However, Melissa did not like the taste of it.

"Praise the Lady!" Benson drank a mouthful as well while Melissa took a nibble of the lemon pudding. She chewed at it repeatedly before swallowing it down unwillingly.

"Give it a try." Klein put down his cup and picked up his fork and

spoon and pointed at the tableful of food.

He was most pessimistic of his thick pea soup. After all, he had never eaten something so strange on Earth. All he could do was adapt the recipe from the original Klein's memory fragments.

As the eldest brother, Benson did not stand on ceremony as he dug up a spoonful of mashed potatoes and stuffed it into his mouth.

The beaten potatoes were boiled thoroughly and mixed with the faint taste of lard and just enough salt. It whetted his appetite and made him salivate.

"Not… bad… Not bad," praised Benson vaguely. "It's much more delicious than the one I had back at work. They only used butter."

This is one of my specialties after all… Klein accepted the praise. "It's all thanks to the teachings of the chef at Welch's place."

Melissa looked at the beef soup. The green basil leaves, the green lettuce heads, and the radishes were submerged in the colorless soup, covering the tender beef. The soup was clear and its fragrance tantalizing.

She forked a piece of beef and placed it in her mouth to chew. The beef retained a little chewiness despite being stewed tender. The mixture of salt, the sweetness from the radishes, and the spiciness from the basil leaves complemented the deliciousness of the beef.

"…" She seemed to give her approbation, but she could not stop her chewing.

Klein tasted it and felt that although it was delicious, it was not without regret. This was still far from his usual standard. After all, he was lacking in certain condiments and could only use replacements. It was no wonder it tasted different.

Of course, even with the best standards, one could only make do with the dishes they cooked personally.

Suddenly, his heart pained for Benson and Melissa who were stunted in their world view.

After swallowing a piece of beef, Klein picked up a piece of fried Tussock Fish which was sprinkled with cumin and rosemary. It was crispy on the outside and tender on the inside. The char was a perfect golden brown and the saltiness and oil fragrance intertwined as one.

Nodding slightly, Klein tried a piece of stewed rhubarb and found it palatable. It got rid of the cloyed taste of meat.

Finally, he mustered his courage and scooped a bowl of thick pea soup.

Too sweet and too sour… Klein could not help but frown.

However, after seeing Benson and Melissa looking satisfied from tasting it, he began suspecting his tastes. He could not help but down a mouthful of ginger beer to cleanse his tongue.

The siblings were stuffed by the end of the meal. They laid slumped in the chairs for quite a while.

"Let us praise the Lady once more!" Benson raised his ginger beer—which had only one mouthful left—as he said in satisfaction.

"Praise the Lady!" Klein downed the last bit of his beverage.

"Praise the Lady." Melissa finally put the last bit of lemon pudding into her mouth and enjoyed the flavors swishing through her mouth.

When Klein saw this, he took advantage of his tipsiness and smiled. "Melissa, that's not right. You should eat the thing you find most delicious at the beginning. That way, you can fully appreciate its most delicious aspects. Tasting it when you are filled and satiated will not do the food justice."

"No, it's still as delicious as it can be," answered Melissa firmly and stubbornly.

The siblings had a happy chat, and after digesting their meals, they cleaned up the plates, cutlery, and stored the oil which was used to fry the fish.

After busying themselves, it was revision time. One refreshed his

accounting knowledge while another continued reading the study material and notes. Time was spent to its fullest.

At eleven, the siblings extinguished the gas lamp and went to bed after washing up.

…

Klein felt groggy as he stared at the darkness in front of him. A figure wearing a black trench coat and half top hat appeared suddenly in Klein's vision. It was Dunn Smith.

"Captain!" Klein jolted awake and knew he was dreaming.

Dunn's gray eyes remained calm, as though he was mentioning something trivial. "Someone has sneaked into your room. Pick up your revolver and force him to the corridor. Leave the rest to us."

Someone has sneaked into my room? The observer has finally taken action? Klein jumped in fright, but did not dare ask further. All he did was nod and say, "Alright!"

The scene before his eyes changed immediately as a swath of colors appeared like the bursting of bubbles.

Klein's eyes opened as he carefully turned his head. He looked toward the window and saw a thin but unfamiliar back standing at his desk, rummaging for something in silence. <

28: Secret Order

Badump! Badump! Badump!

Klein's heart began beating rapidly. It shrank into a clump before expanding abruptly. It made his body tremble gently.

There was an instant when he nearly forgot what he had to do until the lurking figure suddenly paused. The figure pricked his ears slightly as though listening for any changes.

Blood flowed back from his brain as Klein regained his basic cognitive abilities. He reached beneath the pillow for the wooden grip of the revolver.

He felt the firm but smooth feeling as he rapidly calmed down. He silently and slowly pulled out the revolver and aimed it at the trespasser's head.

To be honest, he had no confidence in striking the intruder. Although he was already able to stably hit the target during practice, a moving person and a fixed target were completely different. He was not arrogant enough to confound the two together.

However, he vaguely remembered something from his previous life; the general idea was that a nuclear weapon wielded the greatest strength before its launch.

The principle held in his current situation. The best deterrence was before he shot!

By not pulling the trigger or shooting blindly, the intruder was unable to determine whether or not he was a complete rookie who had an extremely high chance of missing him. His worries and fears

would make him deliberate more, resulting in him restraining himself!

In an instant, another thought arose in him. It immediately made Klein turn decisive. He was not the kind of person who turned calmer when faced with danger; instead, he had already imagined the situation when he faced the observer—using intimidation instead of attacking.

The Foodaholic Empire had an idiom: Where there is precaution there will be no danger!

When Klein pointed his gun at the intruder, the thin man froze suddenly, as though he had sensed something.

Following that, he heard a voice that hid a chuckle.

"Good evening, Sir."

The scrawny man clasped both his hands together, and his body seemed to tense. Klein sat on the lower bunk, aimed the person's head with the revolver, and tried to speak as leisurely and as naturally as he could.

"Please raise both of your hands and turn around. Try to do it slow. To be frank, I am very timid and I get nervous easily. If you move too quickly, I can be frightened, and I can't guarantee that there won't be a situation where I misfire. Yes, that's right."

The scrawny man raised both of his hands and held them up near his head before turning his body bit by bit. The first thing that came into view was a black tight suit with neat buttons. Next, he caught a pair of brown eyebrows that were thick and sharp.

The intruder's deep blue eyes didn't reflect fear, but rather gazed upon Klein with the intensity of a ferocious beast. It seemed that if Klein were careless for a second, the other person would leap forward and tear him to pieces.

He clenched the handle tightly as he tried his best to appear calm and indifferent.

It was only when the thin man faced him completely did Klein jerk his chin towards the door. He softly and gently said, "Sir, let's take this outside. Do not disturb the beautiful dreams of others. Oh, do keep your motions slow. Lighten your footsteps a little too. It's basic courtesy for a gentleman."

The thin man's cold pupils rolled as he swept Klein a glance. He continued raising his hands as he walked slowly to the door.

Under the revolver's aim, he twisted the handle and slowly opened the door.

When the door was half-opened, he suddenly lowered himself and rolled forward. The door was pulled by a strong wind and it closed with a slam.

"Uh…" Benson, who was on the top bunk, was stirred. He almost woke up in a daze.

At that moment, a leisurely and serene melody entered from outside. The heavy and comfortable voice started to sing.

"Oh, the threat of horror, the hope of crimson cries!

"One thing at least is certain—that this Life flies;

"One thing is certain, and the rest is Lies;

"The Flower that once has bloomed forever dies[1]…"

The poem seemed to possess the power to calm and relax others. Benson, who was on the top bunk, and Melissa, who was in another room, again fell asleep amid their grogginess.

Klein's body and mind was also peaceful and quiet. He nearly yawned.

The way the thin man had darted off was so agile that he could not react in time.

Looking at the closed door, he smiled and muttered to himself. "You might not believe it, but pulling the trigger would not release a

round."

The empty chamber to prevent misfiring!

Following that, Klein listened to the midnight poem as he patiently awaited for the battle outside to end.

Within a minute, the tranquil melody which resembled the reflection of moonlight on the surface of a lake stopped, and the dark night resumed its deep silence.

Klein silently spun the cylinder and moved the empty chamber away as he awaited for the outcome.

He uneasily waited for a full ten minutes. Just as he wondered if he should investigate, he heard Dunn Smith's staid and warm voice from the door.

"It's settled."

Phew. Klein exhaled. He held his revolver and took his key. Barefooted, he carefully approached the door before silently opening it to see the black trench coat and the halved top hat. Dunn Smith was standing there with his deep and calm gray eyes.

He closed the door behind him and followed Dunn to the end of the corridor and stood amid the weak crimson moonlight.

"It took me some time to enter his dream," said Dunn calmly as he looked at the red moon outside the window.

"Do you know his background?" Klein felt a lot more relieved.

Dunn nodded and said, "An ancient organization known as the Secret Order. They were established in the Fourth Epoch and are related to the Solomon Empire and a number of fallen aristocrats of that period. Heh, the Antigonus family's diary came from them. Due to a member's negligence, it entered the antique market and was obtained by Welch. They had no choice but to send people in search of it."

Without waiting for Klein's question, he paused before continuing.

"We will capture the remaining members they have according to the clues. Well, it might not end too well. These fellows are as good at hiding as the rats in the sewers. But at the very least, they would believe that we have likely obtained the Antigonus family's notebook or that we have obtained a critical clue. In that case, as long as it's not something extremely crucial or important, they would abandon the operation. That is their philosophy on surviving."

"…What if the notebook is extremely crucial and important?" asked Klein worriedly.

Dunn smiled without an answer. Instead, he said, "We know very little of the Secret Order. Our success this time is all thanks to your sharp wits. This contribution is all yours. In light of the possibility of hidden dangers and how heightened perception would aid in finding the notebook, you have a chance at choosing."

"A chance at choosing?" Klein vaguely guessed something as his breathing subconsciously turned heavy.

Dunn wiped the smile from his face as he said in all seriousness, "Do you wish to become a Beyonder? You can only choose the starting Sequence of an incomplete Sequence.

"Of course, you can give up this chance and choose to accumulate the merit you have garnered. Then, all you have to do is wait till there's sufficient room for you to become a Sleepless, which is also the first, complete Sequence the Goddess has bestowed on the Nighthawks."

Indeed… Klein felt delighted and did not have any hesitant emotions. He took the initiative to ask, "Then from which of the Sequence 9s can I choose from?"

I have to have detailed information to decide whether to give up or accept, as well as choose which one!

Dunn turned around and seemed to be cloaked in the crimson veil that shone down on him. He looked into Klein's eyes and said slowly, "Apart from the Sleepless, the Church has three Sequence 9 potion formulas. One of them is Mystery Pryer, which is also the power Old Neil controls. Heh, Rozanne has likely mentioned this to you. She can

never hold her tongue."

Klein smiled awkwardly, at a loss for an answer. Thankfully, Dunn did not mind it as he continued. "Our Mystery Pryer potion formula and the later Sequences that aren't directly chained were obtained from the Moses Ascetic Order. Back then, it was said that they had yet to fall to corruption. They persisted in their morals and precepts, determined in their pursuit of knowledge. They kept their secrets strictly confidential. Anyone that entered the order would be barred from speaking for five years after becoming a Mystery Pryer. They would learn to keep silent, so as to cultivate and enhance their focus. The maxim of the Moses Ascetic Order—do as you wish, but do no harm—began from them.

"Mystery Pryers have a comprehensive but rudimentary understanding and grasp of magic, witchcraft, astrology, and other mystical knowledge. They also know a fair number of magical rituals, but they can easily sense certain existences that mastermind matters. Therefore, they have to be careful and show respect to their powers as a Beyonder.

"We lack a large portion of this Sequence, causing it to be an incomplete chain. For example, its Sequence 8. Of course, perhaps the Holy Cathedral has it."

This pretty much meets all my requirements… Klein nodded slightly, to the point of having the urge to choose.

Thankfully, he still remembered certain things.

"What about the other two?"

"The second type is named Corpse Collector. Quite a number of cultists who worship Death in the Southern Continent choose it. After consuming the potion, unintelligent dead spirits would mistake them as one of their kind and not attack them. They would gain resistance to the cold, decay, and corrosiveness of cadaveric auras. They will be able to directly see a portion of evil spirits and see the characteristics and weaknesses of undead creatures, as well as gain certain attribute enhancements. We have the Sequence 8 and Sequence 7 that follow it. Heh heh, you probably can guess Sequence 7—Spirit Medium!

This was chosen by Daly back then," described Dunn in detail.

Spirit Medium does appear mysterious and cool, but what I want most is to grasp knowledge of mysticism… Klein did not interject; all he did was listen quietly.

Dunn Smith looked sideways at the crimson moon and said, "We only have Sequence 9 of the third type. Whether the Holy Cathedral has it, I'm not sure. It's called Seer."

Seer? Klein's pupils constricted as he recalled the regret Emperor Roselle had left in his diary: He regretted not choosing Apprentice, Marauder, or Seer!

1. Adapted from the English translation of Rubáiyát.

29: "Jobs" and Rentals Are Serious Business

Klein tried his best to remain his usual self as he asked with genuine interest, "What abilities do Seers have?"

"Your question is inaccurate; the question should be, 'what abilities does consuming the Seer potion give?'" Dunn Smith shook his head and chuckled. His gray pupils and face turned away from the moon as his features hid in the shadows. "There are many kinds of things involved—astromancy, cartomancy, spiritual pendulums, and scrying. Of course, it does not mean that consuming the potion will immediately allow you to grasp all of them. The potion only equips you with the qualifications and ability to learn it.

"As they lack direct means of fighting enemies, heh. You can probably imagine that setting up a magical ritual requires a lot of preparation. It's not suitable for combat. Therefore, in terms of knowledge of mysticism, a Seer will be more learned and professional than a Mystery Pryer."

It sounds like it matches my requirements as well… However, the lack of means to directly deal with enemies is quite a dilemma… Furthermore, the Church of Evernight likely doesn't have the subsequent Sequences… The Holy Cathedral likely refers to the headquarters, the Cathedral of Serenity… The means available to low-Sequence Beyonders against their enemies might not be comparable to firearms… Klein fell into deep thought as he racked his brains. He kept going back and forth between Mystery Pryer and Seer. He no longer considered Corpse Collector.

Dunn Smith smiled when he saw this.

"You don't have to rush into a decision. Tell me your answer Monday morning. Regardless of your choice of Sequence or giving up this opportunity, none of us from the Nighthawks would have any other thoughts on the matter.

"Calm down and ask your heart."

With that said, he took off his hat and bowed slightly. He slowly walked past Klein and headed for the stairwell.

Klein did not say a word and did not immediately reply. He silently bowed and watched as Dunn left.

Although he was constantly hoping to become a Beyonder previously, he was thrown into a dilemma when the opportunity arose; the subsequent missing Sequences, Beyonders having the risk of losing control, the believability of Emperor Roselle's diaries, and the illusory murmurs that could corrupt people into madness all mixed together and formed a moat that obstructed his advancement.

He took a deep breath and slowly breathed out.

"No matter how bad it is, it can't be worse than making an eighteen-year-old high-school student decide on his future career…" Klein gave a self-deprecating chuckle. Gathering his scattered thoughts, he opened the door softly and laid back on the bed.

He lay there with his eyes open, silently looking at the bottom of the top bunk that was dyed with the faint crimson of the moon.

A drunkard staggered outside the window as a carriage sped down the empty streets. These noises did not break the serenity of the night but instead made it even darker and more distant.

Klein's emotions settled down as he recalled his past on Earth. He recalled how he liked exercising, his father who always spoke loudly, his mother who enjoyed busying herself despite having a chronic disease, his friends who grew up with him, going from playing sports like soccer and basketball to games and mahjong, as well as the person he made a failed confession to… These were like a silent river; it did not have many ripples or deep sentimental feelings, but it

silently drowned his heart.

Perhaps one will only learn to cherish things after they have lost them. When the crimson receded and the sky turned golden-yellow from the flaming ball's illumination, Klein had made his choice.

…

He got out of bed and headed to the public bathroom to wash his face to wake himself up. Then, he took a one-soli note to Mrs. Wendy's to buy eight pounds of rye bread with nine pence, replenishing the staple food that had been consumed the previous night.

"The price of bread has begun stabilizing…" He commented after breakfast as Benson changed.

It was Sunday, so both he and Melissa finally had the chance to rest.

Klein, who was already in proper attire, was sitting on a chair and flipping through the outdated newspapers he brought back from yesterday. He said in surprise, "There's a house for rent here: North Borough's 3 Wendel Street, a detached house with two floors. There are six bedrooms, three bathrooms, and two big balconies upstairs. Downstairs, there's a dining hall, a living room, a kitchen, two bathrooms, and two guest rooms, as well as an underground cellar… In front of the house are two acres of private land and there's a small garden behind. It can be rented for one, two, or three years, with a weekly rent of one pound six soli. Those interested can head to Champagne Street and look for Mr. Gusev."

"That's our goal for the future." Benson wore his black half top hat as he smiled to say, "The rent for the places in newspapers is usually a little too expensive. The Tingen City Housing Improvement Company has options that do not pale in comparison to that for cheaper."

"Why are we not searching in the Tingen Housing Improvement Association for the Working Class?" Melissa walked out from her room holding an old, veiled hat. She had changed into a grayish-white long dress that had been mended several times.

She was silent and introverted, but that could not mask her

youthfulness.

Benson laughed.

"Where did you hear of the Tingen Housing Improvement Association for the Working Class? Jenny? Mrs. Rochelle? Or is it from your good friend Selena?"

Melissa looked to the side and whispered a reply, "Mrs. Rochelle… While washing up last night, I happened to meet her. She asked me about Klein's interview and I told her roughly what happened. Then, she suggested I find the Tingen Housing Improvement Association for the Working Class."

Benson noticed Klein's puzzled expression and shook his head in amusement.

"They are targeted at the poor. Well, a precise description is that they are a housing association for the lower strata of society. They build and renovate houses that basically have communal bathrooms. They only provide three choices—a single, double or triple bedroom. Do you wish to continue living in such an environment?

"The Tingen City Housing Improvement Company is in the same business as them, but they also provide choices for the lower-middle class. To be honest, we are a little better than the lower-middle class, but we are still quite worse off than true middle-class families. It's not a matter of salary; it's just that we did not have the time to save up."

Klein came to a realization as he put away the newspaper. Picking up his top hat, he stood up.

"Then, let's set off."

"I remember that the Tingen City Housing Improvement Company is on Daffodil Street," Benson said as he opened the door. "They are like the Tingen Housing Improvement Association for the Working Class, known as Five Percent Charities. Do you know why?"

"I don't know." Klein raised his cane and walked to Melissa's side.

The girl with black hair that reached down her back nodded.

Benson headed out and said, "These kinds of housing improvement associations or companies were established as a result of Backlund. They are funded in three ways: One, by requesting donations from charitable foundations. Two, through funding proposals. They receive grants from the government's commission at a special rate of 4%. Third, through investments. By taking a portion of the rent received, they will give their investors 5% returns. That's why they are called Five Percent Charities."

The siblings went down the stairs and slowly walked toward Daffodil Street. They decided to confirm a place before talking to their present landlord, Mr. Franky. They did not want to be in a situation where they were forced to move when they had no place to stay.

"I heard from Selena that there are housing improvement companies that are purely run as charities?" Melissa asked in thought.

Benson chuckled.

"There are, such as the Deweyville Trust which Sir Deweyville donated money to establish. He builds apartments targeted for the working class. He also provides dedicated estate management personnel while only charging rather low rent. However, the criteria for applying is very strict."

"It sounds like you aren't fond of the idea?" Klein acutely sensed it as he asked with a smile.

"No, I respect Sir Deweyville a lot, but I'm certain he does not know what true poverty is. Staying in his apartment is like a priest giving hope. It's not very pragmatic. For instance, tenants have to receive the main vaccines and they have to take turns cleaning the bathroom. They are unable to sublease their apartments or use it for commercial activities. They aren't allowed to throw their rubbish wantonly and children are prevented from playing in the corridors. Goddess, does he wish to make everyone ladies and gentlemen?" Benson answered in his usual tone.

Klein creased his brows in doubt.

"Doesn't sound problematic. Those are all very reasonable criteria."

"Yeah." Melissa nodded in agreement.

Benson cocked his head and looked at them before chuckling.

"Perhaps I have protected both of you so well that you have not seen actual poverty. Do you think they would have the money for the main vaccines? The line for free charitable organization sets them back three months.

"Do you think their work is stable and not temporary? If they cannot sublet parts of their apartment to receive some extra income, are they to move out when they lose their jobs? Besides, many ladies mend clothes or make match boxes at home to maintain their livelihood. Those are included as commercial activities. Are you going to chase them all out?

"Most of the poor use all their efforts to survive. Do you think they have the time to discipline their children and stop them from running along the corridors? Perhaps they can only be locked at home until they're old enough, then send them to places that accept child labor when they are around seven or eight years old."

Ben did not use many adjectives to describe the matter; it caused Klein to shudder a little.

This was how people from low socioeconomic classes lived?

Beside him, Melissa fell into silence. It took a long while before she said in an ethereal tone, "Jenny no longer wished for me to visit her after she moved to Lower Street."

"Let's hope her father gets back on his feet after that injury and finds a stable job. However, I have seen too many alcoholics use alcohol to numb themselves…" Benson laughed with a somber tone.

Klein was at a loss for words. Melissa seemed to be the same. As such, the siblings walked silently down Daffodil Street and found Tingen City Housing Improvement Company.

The person who served them was a middle-aged man with an amiable smile. He did not wear formal attire or a hat, but instead, wore a white shirt and black vest.

"You can call me Scarter. Might I know what kind of house you have in mind?" When he caught a glance at Klein's silver-inlaid cane, his smile widened.

Klein looked at Benson, who was better with words, and gestured for him to answer.

Benson directly answered, "A terrace house."

Scarter flipped through the files and documents in his hand before smiling.

"There are currently five that haven't been rented out. To be honest, we are geared more to serving customers—laborers and their children who have housing difficulties where six, eight, or even ten or twelve people squeeze into a house. There aren't many terrace houses. There's one at 2 Daffodil Street, one in the North Borough, one in the East Borough… The weekly rent goes from 12 to 16 soli. You can take a look at the detailed introductions here."

He handed over a document to Benson, Klein, and Melissa.

After reading through it, the siblings exchanged looks and pointed to the same spot on the piece of paper simultaneously.

"Let's take a look at 2 Daffodil Street first," said Benson. Klein and Melissa nodded in response.

This place was a district they were familiar with.

30: Brand New Beginning

2, 4, and 6 Daffodil Street were terrace buildings with multifaceted hipped roofs. Their exteriors were painted grayish blue, and three chimneys stood erected.

The place obviously did not have lawns, gardens, or porches. The entrances directly faced the street.

Tingen City Housing Improvement Company's Scarter took out a bunch of keys and while opening the door, introduced, "Our terrace houses do not have foyers, so you enter directly into the living room. There's an oriel window facing Daffodil Street, so there's pretty good lighting…"

Klein, Benson, and Melissa were greeted by a fabric sofa bathing in the golden rays of the sun, and an area more spacious than their previous two-bedroom apartment.

"This living room can be used as a guest hall. To its right is the dining room and on the left is a fireplace that will keep you warm in winter." Scarter pointed around with great familiarity.

Klein looked around and confirmed that it was a crude, open-style concept. The dining room and the living room were not separated by any partitions, but they were also far from the oriel window, making those spots rather dim.

There was a rectangular red wooden table surrounded by six hardwood chairs with soft cushions. The fireplace on the left wall looked exactly like the ones in foreign movies and TV series that Klein used to watch.

"Behind the dining area is the kitchen, but we do not provide any appliances. Opposite to the living room is a small guest room and a bathroom…" Scarter walked around and described the remaining layout of the house.

The bathroom was separated into two parts. The outer area was where one would wash their face and brush their teeth, while the inner area was the toilet. There was an accordion door that separated them. The guest room was described to be small, but it was as big as the room that Melissa currently stayed in. She was stunned at the sight.

After looking around the first floor, Scarter brought the three siblings to the stairway next to the bathroom.

"Down below is the underground cellar. It is quite stuffy downstairs, so you must remember to let some fresh air in first before entering."

Benson nodded casually and followed Scarter to the second floor.

"On my left, there's a bathroom. On the same side, there are an additional two bedrooms. It's the same layout on my right, but the washroom on this side is next to the balcony."

As he spoke, Scarter opened the bathroom door and stood sideways so that he would not obstruct Klein, Benson, and Melissa from looking in.

The bathroom had an extra bathtub. Like the other bathroom, there was an accordion door next to the toilet. Although it was a little dusty, it wasn't dirty, smelly, or cramped.

Melissa looked in a daze until Scarter walked to the bedroom next to it. Only then did she stop looking and follow the rest slowly.

She took another few steps before looking back.

Klein, who was experienced in life, was delighted and excited as well. Even though their landlord often supervised their cleaning up of the bathroom, it still was not clean enough. It was often nauseating, let alone the fact that they would easily encounter a line when they needed to relieve themselves.

The other bathroom was similar. One of the four bedrooms was slightly bigger and was furnished with a bookcase. The rest were about the same size as each other and had a bed, table, and wardrobe.

"The balcony is very tiny, so you won't be able to dry too many clothes in the sun at a time." Scarter stood at the end of the corridor and pointed to a spot with a door and lock. "There is a complete underground drainage, gas piping, meter, and other facilities. It is very suitable for you gentlemen and a lady like yourselves. It only requires thirteen soli of rent and five pence for use of the furniture weekly. In addition, there is a deposit that amounts to four weeks of rent."

Without waiting for Benson to say a word, Klein looked around and asked curiously, "Roughly how much would it cost to buy the house?"

As a transmigrator from the Foodaholic Empire, the desire to buy property still existed within him.

Upon hearing that question, Benson and Melissa were shocked. They looked at Klein as though they were seeing a monster. Scarter replied calmly and firmly, "Buy? No, we do not sell property. We only provide rental properties."

"I'm just trying to have a general sense of the prices." Klein explained awkwardly.

Scarter hesitated for a few seconds before saying, "Last month, the owner of 11 Daffodil Street sold a limited-period land deed with a similar property sitting atop the land. 300 pounds for fifteen years. It is much cheaper than renting directly but not everyone can fork out such a large sum of money. If one would like to buy it over completely, the owner's posted price is 850 pounds."

850 pounds? Klein quickly made the mental calculations.

My weekly pay is three pounds, Benson eans one pound and ten soli… Rent is thirteen soli and if we eat well every day, we would spend nearly two pounds a week. On top of that, there are expenses such as clothes, transportation, social expenditures, so on and so forth. We can only save

less than twenty soli a week. One year adds up to about 35 pounds. 850 pounds would require more than twenty years. Even if we bought the land for a limited period of time for 300 pounds, it would take us at least eight or nine years… That doesn't include getting married, living independently, raising children, traveling, and so on…

In a world without individual housing loans, most people are likely to opt for rental…

Realizing this, he stepped back and stole a glance at Benson. He beckoned him to talk to Scarter about the rent.

As for Melissa's intentions, they were obvious from her bright eyes!

At that moment, Klein had a feeling like he was 'unleashing Benson.'

Benson tapped his plain cane and looked around before he said, "We should take a look at other houses. The dining area's lighting isn't good, and the balcony is very small. Look, only that bedroom has a fireplace, and the furniture is too old. If we move in, we have to at least change half of these…"

He pointed out faults in a hurried tone, spending ten minutes to persuade Scarter to lower the rent to twelve soli and the furniture usage fee to three pence, while rounding up the deposit to two pounds.

Without further ado, the siblings returned with Scarter to the Tingen City Housing Improvement Company and signed two copies of the contract. They then headed over to the Notary Office of Tingen City to notarize the contract.

After paying the deposit and first week's rent, Klein and Benson's remaining money added up to nine pounds, two soli, and eight pence.

Standing before the door of 2 Daffodil Street, they each held a bunch of copper keys. They were momentarily unable to look away; their emotions churning within them.

"It feels like a dream…" After a while, Melissa lifted her head to look at the future "Moretti Residence," and she spoke with a low yet unsteady voice.

Benson let out a breath and smiled.

"Then don't wake up."

Klein wasn't as emotional as they were. He nodded and said, "We need to change the locks of the main door and balcony door as soon as possible."

"There's no hurry. The reputation of Tingen City Housing Improvement Company is very good. The rest of the money is for your formal suit. However, before that, we need to pay Mr. Franky a visit." Benson pointed in the direction of the apartment.

…

The siblings made do with rye bread at home before heading for a terrace apartment on Iron Cross Street. When they knocked on their landlord's door, Mr. Franky declared imposingly while his short frame perched on a sofa, "You know my rules. No one is allowed to be behind their rent!"

Benson leaned forward and smiled.

"Mr. Franky, we are here to give up our lease."

That straightforward? Would negotiating this way work? Standing beside Benson, Klein was shocked when he heard him.

On the way here, Benson had said that his bottomline was a compensation of twelve soli.

"Give up your lease? No! We have a contract, and there's still half a year left!" Franky glared at Benson as he flailed his arms.

Benson looked at him seriously and waited for a moment before saying calmly, "Mr. Franky, you should understand that you could have made much more money."

"Make much more?" Franky asked with interest, touching his skinny face.

Benson sat up straight and explained with a smile, "The two-bedroom

unit was rented to the three of us for five soli and six pence. But if you were to rent it to a family of five or six people, with two or three of them working and getting paid, I think they would be willing to pay more to stay there instead of staying at Lower Street where it's ridden with crime. I think five soli ten pence or six soli would be a reasonable price."

Franky's eyes brightened up and his throat moved as Benson continued to say, "Besides, you are certainly aware that rental prices have been increasing in recent years. The longer we stay, the greater a loss you incur."

"But… I need time to look for a new tenant." Mr. Franky, who had inherited the apartment building, obviously liked the idea.

"I believe you can find one very quickly since you have the ability and resources to do so. Maybe two days, maybe three days… We will pay for the losses you incur during this time. How about the deposit of three soli that we have paid? It is very reasonable!" Benson immediately decided for Franky.

Franky nodded in satisfaction.

"Benson, you are such a conscientious and honest young man. Alright then, let's sign the termination of contract."

Klein was dumbfounded watching this happen. He completely understood how easy it was to 'convince' Mr. Franky.

That's way too easy…

With the problem of the previous contract resolved, the three siblings first helped Klein buy his formal wear and then got busy with moving house.

They didn't have anything heavy or bulky as bulkier items belonged to the landlord. Thus, Benson and Melissa rejected Klein's idea of hiring a carriage, and instead carried their things themselves. They went back and forth between Daffodil Street and Iron Cross Street.

The hot sun outside the window set in the west, and golden rays shone through the oriel window, scattering across the desk's surface.

Klein looked at the rack that had books and notebooks arranged neatly before putting an ink bottle and a fountain pen on the table which he had wiped earlier.

It's finally over… He let out a breath of relief and heard his stomach growl. He loosened his rolled up sleeves as he walked towards the door.

He had a bed that belonged to him. The bedsheet and blanket were white, old but clean.

Klein twisted the doorknob and walked out of his bedroom. Just as he was preparing to say something, he saw both doors on the opposite side open simultaneously as Benson and Melissa came into his view.

Looking at the dust and dirt marks on their faces, Klein and Benson suddenly burst out into laughter, sounding abnormally cheerful.

Melissa bit her lips lightly but the laughter was contagious. She eventually let out a soft laugh.

…

The next morning.

Klein stood before a full-length mirror with no cracks, seriously smoothing out his collar and sleeves of his shirt.

The outfit included a white shirt, black tuxedo, silk top hat, black vest, a set of trousers, boots, and a bow tie. He felt the pinch of paying eight pounds in total.

However, the effect was great. Klein felt that his reflection in the mirror exhibited greater scholarly qualities and made him look more handsome.

Click!

He closed his pocket watch and put it into his inner pocket. He then took his cane and hid his revolver. He took the tracked public carriage and arrived at Zouteland Street.

The moment he entered the Blackthorn Security Company, he realized that he was so used to his previous lifestyle that he had forgotten to give Melissa extra money but allowed her to walk to school instead.

Shaking his head, he took note of it before stepping into Blackthorn Security Company. He saw the brown-haired girl, Rozanne, making coffee. A rich aroma permeated throughout the office.

"Good morning, Klein. The weather is great today," Rozanne greeted him with a smile. "To be frank, I have always been curious. In such weather, don't you men feel hot wearing those formal suits? I know for a fact that Tingen's summer isn't as hot as the South's, but it is still summer."

"It's the price of style," Klein replied humorously. "Good morning, Miss Rozanne. Where's the Captain?"

"Same old place." Rozanne pointed inside.

Klein nodded. He went through the partition and knocked on Dunn Smith's office door.

"Come in." Dunn's voice was deep and gentle as usual.

When he saw Klein, who looked quite different in a set of nice formal wear, he nodded and his gray eyes smiled.

"Have you decided?" he asked.

Klein took a deep breath and answered seriously, "Yes, I have made a decision."

Dunn slowly sat up straight. His expression became solemn but the deep recesses of his gray eyes remained the same.

"Tell me your answer."

Klein replied without hesitation, "Seer!"

31: Potion

Dunn Smith stared at Klein with his gray eyes for a full minute without a word.

Klein did not cower under the pressure of the silence and his gaze. He continued locking his eyes with Dunn.

"You must understand that once you consume the potion, there will be no room for regret." Finally, Dunn spoke again in a deep emotionless voice.

Klein grinned and said, "I know, but I respect the voice in me."

First, Sleepless does not meet my requirements. It was the same for Spectator which he heard from the Tarot Club based on description. He was unsure when he would come into contact with other Beyonder pathways. A slow remedy could not work for an urgent situation; therefore, there was no need for him to wait. By the same logic, Corpse Collector was eliminated as well, leaving the two choices—Mystery Pryer and Seer.

Under the premise that potions of the same Sequence were equally dangerous and him unable to obtain more information, as well as the fact that both Mystery Pryer and Seer met his requirements, then regardless of whether Emperor Roselle was making a passing remark or if he really regretted not choosing Apprentice, Marauder, and Seer, it was enough to tip the balance in his heart.

Furthermore, he could tell from the diary that as long as he figured out the true essence of digestion and acting, he would be able to significantly avoid the potion's negative effects. As for the murmurings and illusory enticements that could drive people to

corruption and madness, he had already encountered that even without being a Beyonder!

"Alright." Dunn stood up and picked up his halved top hat. As he put it on, he said, "Follow me down."

Klein nodded and gave a gentleman's bow in gratitude.

Tap. Tap. Tap. Both of them ventured down, their footsteps echoing through the silent and vast stairwell and passageway.

Klein suddenly felt gripped by anxiety as he tried to find a topic of conversation.

"Captain, you mentioned that taking the potion would not directly give me the corresponding knowledge on mysticism, that I'll only have the qualifications to learn it. Then, where does the basic knowledge of mysticism come from? Did our predecessors risk their lives for it or obtain it via other means?"

Every time he went underground, he would find the air especially fresh. Clearly, the ventilation was excellent. However, the occasional gust of wind made one shiver.

Dunn glanced at him, the darkness in his gray eyes appearing abnormally deep.

He answered calmly, "One of them is as you said, experimentation, summarization, and enhancement. Second, being bestowed by the gods. Third, heh. The dangerous murmurs that others can't hear do not only growl and roar senselessly. At times, they will describe some matters regarding mysticism. But according to what I know, people who truly listen to the murmurs on a long-term basis have gone mad without exception. Or they would fall to corruption and become monsters. Of course, we must thank them. The notebooks they've left behind are precious treasures in the field of mysticism."

Human lab rats? The underground passage's cold humidity made Klein shudder suddenly.

Then, would my luck enhancement ritual which turned into "Social Network Magic" eventually lead to similar effects due to the crazy and

horrible murmurs?

At the intersection, Dunn did not proceed toward Chanis Gate, nor did he turn to the weapons, materials and archives. Instead, he took Klein to the left and approached Saint Selena Cathedral.

Midway, he stopped. It was unclear what he touched to open a secret door.

"This is our Nighthawk team's alchemy room. I will get Old Neil to retrieve the Seer potion formula and the corresponding materials from inside Chanis Gate. Heh, you have pretty good luck. The Goddess has blessed you with 'Her' favor. We should still have the materials needed for two Seer potions. If not, you would have to wait a long while." Dunn pointed at the room behind the door. "Wait here. Later, watch Old Neil concoct the potion. It's the most basic part of mysticism studies. Oh, do not randomly touch things in there. They are either very dangerous, expensive, or both."

With that said, Dunn added like before.

"Oh right, I forgot something again. Your becoming a Beyonder is a result of you having to face danger and the need to find the notebook. The meritorious deed was only a part of it; therefore, you will not be a member of our team for the time being. You will still be a civilian staff member with a corresponding salary. You will still do what I instructed you to do previously. One additional thing is to learn more about mysticism with Old Neil. You can arrange the time with him."

"Alright." Other than feeling a little disgruntled by the lack of a pay rise, Klein was in full agreement with the rest.

According to Dunn, there was still the process of learning and grasping one's newfound powers after consuming the potion. If he were to become a formal member immediately and participate in paranormal missions, his death was certain.

Dunn turned around and walked two steps towards the intersection when he suddenly turned back.

"Another thing."

I knew it… Klein was already used to the "style" of his Captain.

"We got something out of the Secret Order's actions," said Dunn with his usual expression. "It's unlikely they will provoke you in the near future, but don't be careless. It has to do with them being temporarily unable to confirm whether the Antigonus family's notebook is important to them. From what we discovered, they have preserved some of the ancient customs and we can confirm that they are related to the Solomon Empire and the corrupted nobles of that period."

"Got it. Thanks, Captain," said Klein as he exhaled.

This was also one of the reasons why he did not wish to wait, grasping the chance of becoming a Beyonder in such a hurry!

As he watched Dunn leave and confirmed that he would not turn his head to say more, Klein slowly walked into the alchemy room.

The room had long tables. There were test tubes, pipettes, scales and crucibles. It resembled a chemistry laboratory from his previous life. It was just more spartan and ancient.

Other than that, there was a huge cauldron, a darkwood ladle, a translucent crystal ball, and other items. The Dark Sacred Emblem and other strange emblems were visible everywhere. They gave the room a tint of mystery.

Klein looked around with interest, but he was not stupid enough to touch the things.

After a while, he heard footsteps. Old Neil carried a tiny silver chest with complicated patterns. He was still wearing his unique classic black robe that seemed anachronistic, matched with a felt hat with a rounded edge of the same color.

"Lad, I never expected you to choose Seer." Old Neil put down the chest and used his somewhat turbid red eyes to size up Klein. "Your personality is just like mine when I was young. You just don't want to follow the masses. Not bad. Light these few gas lamps and close the door."

"Alright." Klein tried hard not to tremble as he lit each gas lamp in the alchemy room. He made dim light rule over the place once again.

Tak! Tak! Tak! The secret door was closed. He turned back to see the white-haired and deep-wrinkled Old Neil using a bunch of strange tied tree branches to scrub the black cauldron.

"The concoction of a Sequence potion is extremely simple, at least for Sequence 7 and below. There's no need for a special flame or any additional ritual, much less an incantation. There's no need for one to participate in it spiritually. All one needs to do is go according to the formula's steps, add the precise amounts, and mix it. That will be all." Old Neil's wrinkles seemed to bloom from his smile.

"For real?" Klein questioned in surprise.

This sounds as simple as my luck enhancement ritual…

Man, it's quite frightening when you come to think of it…

"Perhaps it's a gift of the gods. Praise the Lady." Old Neil drew a haphazard circle over his chest.

Following that, he opened the silver chest and pulled out goatskin parchment that exuded antiquity.

The yellowish-brown goatskin unfurled inch by inch, revealing words on it. Klein looked from a distance and realized it was in Hermes, a language he was very familiar with.

It was written in ink that resembled blood, seemingly having its fluidity remain intact. But other than that, it did not seem extraordinary in any way.

Seer: 100 milliliters of pure water, 13 drops of night vanilla liquids, 7 gold mint leaves… Klein silently recited the formula's content, but the rest of it was blocked by Old Neil's wrist, preventing him from reading it.

"Pure water is water that is repeatedly distilled. Thankfully, I made some previously, so there's no need to waste time on it." While Old Neil gave the introduction, he took a large sealed glass bottle from the table with great familiarity.

He took off the stopper and poured about 100 milliliters of pure water into the cauldron without much thought.

Klein did not dare ask, afraid he would affect Old Neil's concoction. After all, he was the one drinking the potion.

"13 drops of night vanilla juices. This can be extracted and stored as an essential oil ahead of time." Old Neil took out a tiny brown bottle from the silver chest and with a pipette and dripped 13 drops into the cauldron in a relaxed manner.

A faint but easing fragrance emanated, making Klein feel an abnormal sense of peace.

"7 gold mint leaves…" Old Neil picked up a silver patterned can and removed its lid. With his bare hands, he picked up a few leaves and scattered it into the cauldron. He caught a whiff of a fresh and stimulating scent.

"4, 5, 6, 7. Perfect." Old Neil chuckled and looked at the potion formula on the goatskin. "3 drops of poison hemlock. This isn't something you should drink randomly. It can cause your entire body to numb to the point of death. In ancient times, it proved to be the best option for committing suicide."

It's not like I'm silly… Klein lampooned.

Old Neil changed pipettes and dripped the poison hemlock into the cauldron. The mixture caused a strange smell that freshened one's mind.

"9 grams of dragon blood grass powder." Old Neil took his time to reach his hand into the silver chest and pulled out a transparent test tube. There was some deep black powder inside.

He used a beaker and a scale to measure 9 grams of powder and poured it into the cauldron. He then stirred the mixture twice with the darkwood ladle. The laidback process of making the concoction made Klein a little worried.

"In fact, the materials from before were just supplemental. The exact amount doesn't really affect the final outcome. Should I put a little bit

more?" Old Neil made a joke. "The last two is what's crucial. The amount can be slightly lowered, but it cannot be too far from the requirement, or your 'enhancement' can fail. Oh, the quantity cannot be any more, even just by a bit. If so, you will have to be treated for mental problems. It's not impossible to die immediately."

Klein immediately tensed up as he saw Old Neil pull out a black glass bottle from the silver chest.

"Lavos Squid's blood, 10 milliliters. This kind of squid is considered an extraordinary biological species. It is clearly mutated. It is covered in mystery. Its blood will rapidly break down under sunlight and lose its unique qualities. It has to be stored in opaque material." Old Neil's tone no longer sounded relaxed. He quickly and carefully retrieved 10 milliliters of blood with a test tube.

The blood was blue like the sky. From time to time, it produced illusory bubbles as though it was connected to the spiritual world.

"After pouring the blood inside the test tube, the remaining drops are ignored as a form of precaution," whispered Old Neil.

The moment the blue blood entered the cauldron and made contact with the liquid from before, it produced bubbling sounds. The surrounding light was dyed with a light blue tinge, making Klein feel a strange sense of distance but also familiarity.

It felt like the feeling of being in a mother's womb. It elevated a human's soul.

"The final item. Star Crystal. 50 grams." Old Neil's voice sounded in Klein's ears, jolting him awake as he looked at the table.

In the old gentleman's hand was a piece of extremely pure crystal. Furthermore, the crystal appeared gelatinous, as though it was jelly from Earth. It lacked hardness.

Under the blue light's illumination, it reflected bits of light as it seemed to contain a resplendent void of stars within.

"This is excellent material for the creation of divination crystals… Just a little less in consideration of any mistakes." As Old Neil

measured, he used a tiny patterned silver blade to extract the crystal.

"Pure water, night vanilla, gold mint leaves, poison hemlock juice, dragon blood grass, Lavos Squid blood, and Star Crystal make up a Seer…" At that moment, Klein could not help but recall the formula.

With everything done, Old Neil poured in a few blocks of Star Crystal into the cauldron.

Sizzle!

Illusory fog instantly spewed forth, turning the alchemy room into a blur.

Klein seemed to see a vast array of stars amid the fog and felt like he was being observed by an invisible existence.

A few seconds later, the fog dissipated. Old Neil used the darkwood ladle and scooped out some sticky dark-blue liquid. It had strange characteristics—gooey and inseparable. Not one bit was left in the black cauldron.

The dark-blue liquid was poured into an opaque cup before Old Neil pointed at it.

"It's done, your Seer potion."

32: Spirit Vision

Klein looked at the dark-blue gelatinous liquid, finding it hard to describe it as either a block or cup of liquid. He swallowed his saliva and said in great difficulty, "Am I to drink it just like that?

"Is there no need for any other preparations? Like a ritual, an incantation, or a prayer?"

Old Neil acknowledged tersely before saying, "Preparation? There is. Get a cup of Intis Aurmir grape wine, suck on a Desi cigar, then whistle a relaxing tune, and dance an upbeat court dance. You can do a tap dance if you prefer that. Finally, play a round of Gwent cards…"

When he saw Klein's expression turn dumbfounded, Old Neil laughed and summarized what he had just said.

"If you feel nervous."

…*You are quite humorous, aren't you…?* The corners of Klein's mouth twitched as he resisted the urge to draw his gun.

He put his cane down and extended his right hand. As though he held something heavy, he raised the opaque cup. The smell of the potion was faint and seemingly ethereal.

"Lad, do not hesitate. The more you hesitate, the more nervous and afraid you will be. That will only affect the absorption that follows," said Old Neil with his back facing Klein. It was as though he had said it casually.

It was unknown when he arrived by the nearby water basin. He turned on the tap and washed his hands.

Klein nodded silently and took a deep breath. Just like he was back when he was a child, he pinched his nose and drank it like medicine. He moved the opaque cup to his mouth and tipped his head, drinking it down with a gulp.

A cool and smooth feeling quickly filled his oral cavity. It then flowed through his gullet and into his stomach.

The sticky, dark-blue liquid seemed to grow out thin and long tentacles, bringing stimulation and coldness to every cell in Klein's body.

He could not help but convulse as his vision rapidly went into a blur. All colors seemed to saturate. The reds were redder, the blues were bluer, and the blacks were blacker. The rich colors blended like an impressionist painting.

Klein had seen such a scene before. It was back when he was questioned by the Spirit Medium, Daly.

At that moment, his vision became a blur and although his mind felt light, it was clear. He felt like a castaway floating in the sea.

Slowly, his surroundings turned discernible. All the colors returned to their original as a grayish and blurry fog emanated.

Around him were forms he found difficult to describe. There were transparent objects that did not seem to exist. Deep down, there were lustrous brilliances of different colors which seemed to possess life or contain immense knowledge.

This is a little similar to what I saw during the luck enhancement ritual… As Klein instinctively looked down, he realized that 'he' was still standing in his original spot, body convulsing.

Suddenly, he came to a realization, causing his consciousness to sink abruptly and fuse with him.

Boom!

The fog quickly dissipated as the colors returned to normal. The bright, clear halo and the inexistent objects instantly vanished.

The scene in the alchemy room returned to normal, but Klein felt his head swell. He felt like it was being yanked apart. Whatever he saw had countless afterimages. His ears were overwhelmed by an ethereal murmur.

"Hornacis… Flegrea… Hornacis… Flegrea… Hornacis… Flegrea…"

Klein felt a stabbing pain at his forehead as he quickly had thoughts of causing destruction to vent the discomfort in him.

He frowned and hurriedly shook his head.

"Is your vision abnormal? Are you also hearing things you usually didn't?" said Old Neil, at his side with a concealed smile.

"Yes, Mr. Neil, what should I do?" Klein tolerated the intense mania and asked.

Old Neil chuckled.

"This is the resulting seepage of the potion's energy. You lack the means to control it. Alright, do as I say. Think of an object in your mind, something common. Make it simple and easy."

Klein quickly focused as he envisaged his own halved top hat woven from black silk. He recalled the feeling when he touched it and its exact shape.

"Place all your focus on it. Keep repeating that while creating the outlines. Does it feel a little better?" Old Neil's voice penetrated into his mind like a serene song.

Klein turned his focus bit by bit to the imagined top hat. He felt the murmurs subside into a whisper before they vanished. The afterimages he saw also stacked upon one another and no longer appeared a blur.

"Much better," said Klein after calming his mind of chaotic emotions and having exhaled.

He looked down at his body and discovered that nothing abnormal had happened.

He moved his limbs and with half-anticipation and half-doubt, asking, "I succeeded? I'm now considered a Seer?"

Old Neil pulled out a mirror-like mercury plate and shoved it in front of him.

"Look at your eyes."

Klein focused his gaze and saw that he was wearing a black top hat. His outline stood out and his facial features looked normal. Apart from having his face covered in sweat, he did not seem different in any way.

He followed Old Neil's instruction and carefully looked at his eyes. Only then did he discover that his brown eyes had deepened quite significantly. It was so much deepened that it was like the night—one in complete darkness. It felt so deep that it could absorb the souls of others.

Normally, dark brown pupils are easily recognized as black. Without looking very carefully, even Klein himself would not have noticed.

"This is a physical manifestation of the potion's powers. When you learn Cogitation and how to converge your power, your eyes will return to normal." Old Neil smiled as he reached out his right hand. "Congratulations, our new Beyonder, our Seer."

"Thank you." Klein reached out his hand and shook it. "Mr. Neil, when can I learn how to Cogitate?"

"You can learn it now. The initial steps of Cogitation are relatively simple. It's even more so for Beyonders," said Old Neil with a smile. "Just now, producing an object in your mind to divert your attention and turning the energy seepage inwards is actually the first step to Cogitation. Try doing it again."

Klein closed his eyes and once again, his mind depicted the halved top hat.

His concentration seemed to be more easily focused than before. Soon, random thoughts that surfaced would quickly vanish, leaving the hat's outline.

"Let your brain go somewhat blank. Exchange the object you imagined. Use something that does not exist in this world, an object you imagine completely out of thin air."

"You have to follow this rule. Only by doing so can you enter Cogitation, only then can you exceed the concept of 'I.' The limitless 'I' will become one with the universe, giving you the ability to see and understand the truth. You will obtain knowledge only you yourself can understand. In the domain of mysticism studies, it's called a Mystic Experience," said Old Neil using a pacifying tone. "You just need to listen to the descriptions that I'll get to later. What's most important is to enter Cogitation."

Something that doesn't exist in this world. Imagine something completely out of thin air… Would things from Earth count? Klein attempted using an earthy-green intercontinental missile he saw on television. He replaced the half top hat with this long and thick missile.

However, regardless of how he outlined it or imagined it, he ultimately only ended up focusing his attention.

It doesn't seem like it will work… Klein had no choice but to let his imagination run wild. He outlined a sphere of light and then many similar objects, gathering them together.

The spheres of light stacked upon one another. It felt like an object of fantasy. Klein's thoughts gradually turned ethereal and afloat.

His body and mind calmed down. The objects that did not seem to exist, the fog with the bright clusters of light, and the complex colors appeared once again. They floated in the sky in close reach.

He extended his spirituality inch by inch as he looked down at them quietly. He sensed it and took it in.

"Very good. As expected of a Seer. You entered Cogitation very smoothly. You are just slightly worse than me back then. Slightly," said Old Neil with a chuckle. "In that case, I'll begin teaching you the most common, easiest to grasp, and most useful ability in the future in mysticism. Spirit Vision!"

He switched off the gas lamps one after another but opened the door to the alchemy room. It made the spot where Klein was dark, but not to the point of failing to make out silhouettes of objects.

"Alright. in your present state, raise your hands and place them in front of your eyes. Your index fingers need to face each other, but they are not to touch.

"Open your eyes and keep them open until you are accustomed to the darkness."

Klein completed each step according to Old Neil's description. He saw the silhouettes of his fingers and the surrounding objects.

"Actually, you should be lying down to let your body be entirely relaxed. But since the effect of your Cogitation is not bad, let's continue." Old Neil laughed. "Focus your gaze on a spot behind your hands. It has to be behind. Then, slowly move your fingers and maintain the same pose without touching them. Also, do not pull them out of your sight."

Klein calmly heeded the instructions and cast his gaze at an empty spot behind his palms. He then slowly moved his index fingers within his vision.

Once, twice, thrice… Suddenly, Klein saw a fiery-red color in between his fingers.

"Eh…" He let out a sound.

"You see color? That's right. That's the initial step to Spirit Vision. The color you see is your aura," said Old Neil with a chuckle. "No rush. Do it a few more times. After stabilizing it, look elsewhere. I'll also take this opportunity to explain to you the meanings of the different colors."

"Alright." Klein moved his fingers back and forth while having his vision trained on the fiery-red.

Old Neil thought for a moment before saying, "To put it simply, the mainstream way of mysticism is to split non-physical parts of a human into four levels. At its core is the Soul Body, which is also

everyone's basic spirituality. There is a school of thought that believes all biological creatures have spirituality and have a Soul Body.

"I'm not sure about anything else, but to Mystery Pryers, the goal of Cogitation and the method to increase our strength is directed toward the Soul Body.

"Outside the Soul Body is the Astral Projection. It is the means for the Soul Body to communicate with the spirit world and with the cosmos. It's considered an external manifestation of the Soul Body. Besides, it will be directly related to your personal ambition and your prevailing emotions… The scenes you see after consuming the potion are scenes your Astral Projection sees when it wanders through the spirit world. That world does not obey the laws of the physical world. It involves exceeding the concept of 'I,' the limitless 'I', and the Universe's 'I.' The past, present, and future might be stacked upon one another and that is the source of divination.

"In the spirit world, what you see is just imagery, a symbol. You have to interpret it to understand its actual meaning.

"Divination and many magic spells are cast through the Astral Projection.

"Do not mistake its relationship and differences with a Soul Body."

One is just a body and the other is for form… Klein continued looking at the aura in between his fingertips and made the simple conclusion.

"Further out will be the Body of Heart and Mind. From this point forth, it will combine with the physical body… It involves your brain and is an overall manifestation of your inferential abilities, your analytical abilities, your observational abilities, and identification abilities. Some potions will mainly raise this. Quite a number of magic spells target it as well."

Old Neil explained in relatively great detail, "The outermost layer is the Ether Body. It is a manifestation of your vital energies and physical form."

"The aura color you see is an external phenomenon of your Ether Body. In other words, apart from the spiritual bodies, ghosts, and specters you can see directly with Spirit Vision, it might also include certain existences that should not be seen. You can also see the Ether Bodies of others or their auras. From their thickness, brightness, and color, you can determine their health and emotional state.

"When your Spirit Vision improves and you grasp more mysticism knowledge, you will be able to discover even more details. You can even determine the lifespan of others.

"By the way, the emotional state I mentioned would also manifest itself because of your Astral Projection. When you go higher in Sequence, your Spirit Vision will reach a relatively high stage. Someone else's Astral Projection will even be detectable. That way, you will learn even more things. This is a level only Seers and Mystery Pryers can attain.

"Some fellows even claim that the strongest form of Spirit Vision allows one to see anything in any place, including the past and future. However, I'm skeptical about it."

It sounds quite powerful… Klein was almost turning eager.

Old Neil coughed and continued, "Let's return to the Ether Body and the colors of the auras. Your limbs and parts that are required in motion will appear red. Your head and brain's surface will appear purple. Spots that excrete waste will appear orange. The digestion system will appear as yellow. The heart and other regulatory systems will appear green. Your throat and other parts of the nervous system will appear blue. An entirely balanced body will make a body be cloaked in white… That is a symbol of health.

"Once it turns dark or the thickness thins, the color will change. That indicates that the corresponding spot has turned problematic. It means it's in a state of exhaustion or illness.

"In addition, the inner layer of the Astral Projection represents prevailing emotions. Red means passion and excitement. Orange means warmth and satisfaction. Yellow means happiness and extroversion. Green means calm and peace. Blue means coldness and

stillness that one is in thought. White means brightness, an eagerness to improve. Dark colors mean worry, sorrow, and silence. Purple means that spirituality is taking control of the lead, coldness and estrangement…"

Klein silently memorized the information and stabilized his initial Spirit Vision.

"Good, you can look at other objects." Old Neil did not speak further as he nodded.

Klein slowly turned his head and looked at Old Neil. Indeed, he saw different colors in different parts of his body. The aura was both thick and thin at different spots. The purple color at his head was brightest and his limbs' redness was relatively dark. The overall whiteness to his body was somewhat faded as well.

Indeed, he's getting on in age… Klein made a silent comment to himself.

Only with what he saw did he feel that he had become a Beyonder!

"I am now a Beyonder!"

He shifted his gaze and carefully sized up Old Neil when suddenly he saw a translucent pair of cold and ruthless eyes without any brows in the void behind him!

These nearly illusory eyes were staring at Old Neil intently, as well as him!

Wh— Klein shuddered as he gaped and said, "You have a pair of eyes behind you!"

Old Neil was taken aback before he forced a smile.

"Ignore them."

33: Switch

The moment Old Neil finished his sentence, the illusory pair of eyes that lurked in the darkness behind him vanished. Even in his Spirit Vision state, Klein was no longer able to identify traces of its existence.

"This is a characteristic of ritualistic magic," explained Old Neil with a chuckle.

Fascinating… Is Spirit Vision an enhanced version of Yin-Yang eyes? Klein felt like a child who had received a new toy. In excitement, he turned his gaze away and began observing every corner of the room. He wanted to see the differences of the alchemy room with and without the Spirit Vision.

The outlines of the objects in the dark such as the tables, test tubes, scales, cups, and cupboards did not look different from how it looked without Spirit Vision. They did not emit any lights or colors.

Objects without lives do not have any spirituality? Klein mumbled to himself as he swept his gaze toward the silver chest.

Suddenly, he saw a vibrancy of colors. The colors were as blue as the sky, as resplendent as the stars, or as crimson red as burning flames!

"Materials from extraordinary beings still have some life in them, and uh… are still active? Even if the source is already dead?" Klein deliberated on his words as he sought Old Neil's help.

"A precise description is that they have remnant spiritualities. It is one of the crucial points of a successful potion concoction. It is also one of the reasons why a Beyonder will lose control. Dunn should

have already informed you," explained Old Neil frankly.

He suddenly laughed, having recalled something.

"I remember that the formula of Corpse Collector requires a desiccated mature black-spotted frog. To consume that potion requires a lot of courage."

Klein imagined a little and found it disgusting. He did not echo Old Neil's words and turned his gaze to a dark area. However, there were no spiritual bodies or ghosts that he looked forward to seeing.

"Isn't it said that the world of spirits is everywhere?" he asked out of curiosity.

Old Neil chuckled tersely before saying, "Punk, repeat after me.

"This is the headquarters of a Nighthawk squad. This is the ground beneath the Church of Evernight. There are many Beyonders here!

"Do you think we will allow spirits and souls to wander around here? Furthermore, the spiritual world and spirit are two different concepts."

Klein felt a little embarrassed as he turned his head, pretending to look at the faint light from the gas lamps at the entrance.

"I get it."

While speaking, the area between his brows began to spasm.

What's happening? Just as Klein turned around to ask, he suddenly saw a figure standing quietly by the door at the periphery of the light. It appeared human, though its aura's colors and the darkness blended perfectly, making it impossible to discern.

Hiss!

Klein felt a painful spasm at his glabella[1]. His vision turned chaotic as he focused his attention again, but there was no "formless" figure!

Strange… He turned around and asked.

"Mr. Neil, the spot in between my brows is a little painful from spasms."

"Haha, this is very common. You are a new Beyonder. Spirit Vision places a great burden on your Soul Body. Furthermore, it drains you constantly. Physical effects can be glabella spasms, headaches, oversensitivity, and minor bouts of hallucinations. And while viewing things with Spirit Vision, it's very easy to feel uncomfortable as a result of the unfamiliar surroundings. It's also very easy to have your emotions affected by others. These are things that require you to pay attention. You can become accustomed to and eliminate them with repeated practice. In addition, use it sparingly and end it in a timely fashion," answered Old Neil with a smile.

Why does it feel like you are delighted by this… Klein hurriedly asked for advice, "Then, how do I exit from the state of having Spirit Vision?"

He had planned on mentioning the invisible figure he had seen, though when he heard of the minor bouts of hallucination among the symptoms, he struck that thought away.

From the glabella spasm and headache, he could completely guess Old Neil's answer!

"Like before, think of an item to divert your attention. It will bring you out of Cogitation. Close your eyes and control your spirituality and repeatedly tell it to end. When you open your eyes again, you will discover that your Spirit Vision has ended."

Old Neil described leisurely and when he was done, added, "Of course, that is the most trivial and clumsy method. We can repeatedly hint to ourselves in Cogitation from practice to affect our spirituality. That way, you will have a simple switch. For instance, tapping at your glabella twice lightly would allow you to easily activate Spirit Vision. Another two taps will simply end it. As for how you set it up, it depends on your habits and preferences.

"Got it." Klein thought for a moment and planned to imitate Old Neil to use tapping his glabella twice as a switch for his Spirit Vision.

Tapping once was easily mistaken as an instinctive knock to his head and tapping thrice could be a waste of valuable time in dangerous situations. As for actions like snapping fingers, they were too attention-drawing.

He eased his focus and imagined the stacked spheres of light and re-entered a state of Cogitation.

Under Old Neil's guidance, after repeated hints and practice, he finally "set up" his "switch."

He clenched his fist slightly and used his index finger's joint to tap at his glabella twice. Immediately, there were glowing auras of differing thickness and colors appearing before his eyes.

After another two taps, everything returned to normal.

"I've finally grasped it…" he sighed with delight.

Only then did he realize how exhausted he was, feeling like he could fall asleep at any time. His mind hurt as though he had stayed up for three nights.

Old Neil said with a chuckle, "We are not Sleepless. Every practice and every time Spirit Vision is used excessively, you will need some sleep. You can now go back and have a good rest. In the afternoon, go to Iron Cross Street where Welch's place is and walk around. Try your best to find clues about the Antigonus family's notebook as soon as possible. Tomorrow, I'll continue teaching you about mysticism. Of course, do not forget to read the historical documents."

"Alright." Klein was in full agreement with Old Neil's arrangements.

He picked up his cane and left the alchemy room. He watched the door close as Old Neil returned to the armory. Klein massaged his glabella and temples and with the help of his cane, sauntered up the stairwell.

At that moment, Dunn Smith came from behind him with the corners of his lips hooked. With a deep gaze, he said, "I heard from Old Neil that you are a very suitable candidate. Even without Cogitation, you were able to use Spirit Vision."

"Perhaps, it's a unique trait of being a Seer," replied Klein humbly.

He guessed that Dunn had been watching the armory for Old Neil.

Dunn slowed down and went ahead of Klein a little. After a few seconds of silence, he turned around and said, "You have to remember that curiosity killed the cat. It can also kill Beyonders. Do not attempt to probe the murmurings you should not be listening to or seeing existences you should not see."

"Alright." Klein knew this was another reminder of how Beyonders lost control.

After entering Blackthorn Security Company, he greeted Rozanne who obviously did not know that he had become a Beyonder. He slowly walked out the door and reached the streets where he took a trackless carriage to Daffodil Street. He nearly fell asleep on his return journey.

It was still in the morning and the temperature was about twenty-six degree Celsius. Klein pulled out a copper key from his waistband and opened the door to his home.

There were still many items missing from his home. The living room and dining hall were still empty. Benson and Melissa had work or school, so they had both left early in the morning.

Klein did not have the capacity to bother with anything else. He closed the door and briskly went to the second floor and entered the bookshelf-equipped bedroom that belonged to him.

After taking off his tuxedo and hanging it on a clothing rack, he eagerly plunged into bed. The moment his head hit the pillow, he fell asleep.

Klein was awoken by bright sunlight. He turned his head and slowly opened his eyes to discover the burning sun outside.

"What time is it? Did I miss the Tarot Club in the afternoon?" He struggled to get up and walked to the clothing rack to take out his pocket watch from the pocket of the tuxedo's inner lining.

Not only had he forgotten about the matter, he had forgotten to close the door to his bedroom and pulled the curtains to the oriel window.

Pa!

Klein pulled out the pocket watch and immediately felt relieved when he opened it.

It was only slightly past noon. There was still a lot of time until the scheduled gathering at three in the afternoon.

It was Monday, the day he would have a gathering with The Hanged Man and Justice.

Klein went into thought as he tapped his glabella twice. The scene before him changed once again as he saw that his body had been restored to a bright luster.

He tapped twice again and stopped his Spirit Vision. Relaxed, he went to the first floor and boiled a kettle of water. He placed some inferior-quality tea leaves and chewed on some rye bread dabbed in a little butter.

Afterwards, Klein flipped through historical materials and original Klein's diary. He began 'revising' and consolidating his knowledge.

…

At 2:57pm, Klein closed his book and capped his fountain pen before pulling the curtains.

Immediately following that, he locked the bedroom's door, making the room turn abnormally dark.

He tapped his glabella twice and activated Spirit Vision to survey his surroundings.

After confirming that there were no invisible spiritual bodies in his room, Klein stopped the Spirit Vision and took out his pocket watch to check the time.

Tick-tock. Tick-tock.

One minute before three, he opened up his pace and like before, walked four steps in a counter-clockwise manner in a squarish shape. He chanted in Chinese softly.

Only this time, he did not prepare any staple food.

Klein closed his eyes as he felt the back of his hands turn itchy. It felt like the four black dots forming a square were protruding and projecting something.

Hysterical shouts and alluring murmurs began resounding, but Klein realized that the headache was not as bad as the first time.

It was not that he was unaffected, but that he was doing his best to stop himself from listening.

As a Beyonder, he had to have more self-control in such an environment.

Soon, his body turned light as he floated up. He saw the grayish-white and blurry fog that emanated. Then, he saw dark red 'stars.' Two of them had a minuscule connection with him with an abnormal sense of familiarity.

Klein looked at his blurry self and muttered in confusion, "The Astral Projection that Old Neil mentioned?"

He remained calm for a few seconds and again transformed the opulent divine palace with the tall bronze table under the domed ceiling, as well as the twenty-two high-back chairs that corresponded to the different constellations.

Klein calmly walked to the Seat of Honor and made his body and face be immersed in thicker gray fog. He extended his right hand and tapped two familiar deep-red stars and created a miraculous connection.

1. The glabella, in humans, is the skin between the eyebrows and above the nose.

34: Advance Payment

In an underground basement without any windows, the burly Alger Wilson sat by a long table with various apparatuses and goatskin parchments on it.

In front of him was a half-consumed candle. The dim, yellowish flame's flickering made the shadows of the objects and table move like a mirage.

Alger's hair was disheveled like seaweed with a deep blue color that resembled black. He wore a robe with lightning patterns embroidered on it. He clasped his hands with his thumbs facing each other while he focused on a bottle of black liquid to the left of the candle.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!

Splash! Splash! Splash!

The sound of tempestuous winds or the crashing of the sea waves howled from inside the sealed bottle. And in spots where the black ink did not sink, a faint fog would swirl. It was as though it grew eyes and a mouth.

Alger cocked his head to glance at the clock hanging on the wall and watched the needle strike three.

He pressed down on his temple as his eyes turned dark. Fascinating colors surfaced from the various items on the table.

At that moment, he discovered a deep-red light appear like a tidal wave from nowhere, drowning him instantly!

…

Backlund, Empress Borough, Inside the Hall family's luxurious mansion.

After dismissing her dance teacher, Audrey locked the door and sat straight up in front of her dressing table.

The sun outside was bright and gorgeous. There was a light-brown notebook made of exquisite goat skin. It was flipped open to reveal that it was blank. To its right was a fountain pen with a golden tip and embedded rubies.

Audrey did a test and made sure that she could pick up the fountain pen and write down the formula the moment she left the Gathering.

"I'm so looking forward to it…" She inhaled to repress her excited emotions as she looked at the mirror with puckered lips.

However, she did not see it reflect herself. Instead, a dark red and illusory beam burst out from her body!

…

Above the gray fog stood a majestic divine hall that looked like a giant's residence.

Dark red colors bloomed on both sides of the bronze table. They surged upwards like a fountain before pattering down. It 'carved' two blurry figures who sat in the same spots as before.

Audrey, with her soft blond hair and tall, slim build, instinctively looked towards the Seat of Honor. She saw the figure immersed in thick gray fog sitting back. One hand was flat, touching the table's side while the other hand was stroking his chin.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Fool~!" Audrey shouted with a cheery voice.

Following that, she turned her head and looked at the person opposite her. With the same tone, she said, "Good afternoon, Mr. Hanged Man~!"

This lady sure is unsophisticated. Is she so sure that I'm a good person? Why isn't there any fear from her? Is she a noble lady who has been

protected well? Klein smiled and maintained his unfathomable image.

"Good afternoon, Miss Justice."

As he spoke, he lowered his head slightly and moved his left hand and tapped his glabella twice.

What he saw changed instantly. He saw Justice and The Hanged Man emit the colors of their aura!

And the surrounding gray fog and dark red stars remained the same. Nothing that seemingly did not exist or lustrous brilliances that possessed life was seen.

He shifted his gaze and saw that Justice's aura perfectly matched the colors Old Neil described. What was supposed to be red, purple, blue, or white were their respective colors. Furthermore, they maintained a lustrous brilliance and were of appropriate thickness. It was easy to tell that she was a vibrant young girl.

The colors of her emotions are red and yellow. That's joy, zeal, and excitement… Klein made a judgment before casting his attention towards The Hanged Man.

Like Justice, there was nothing special about the colors of The Hanged Man's aura. His emotions were blue mixed in with some orange.

Calm, thoughtful, careful, and a little pleased? With this being his first attempt, Klein made a conclusion without much confidence.

Just as he shifted his gaze away, he suddenly realized something strange.

The aura of The Hanged Man's innermost layer was nearly of the same color!

Klein focused his mind and took another careful look. He could faintly see that deep within The Hanged Man's Ether Body was a deep blue, akin to the sea. It felt like a tidal storm.

His Astral Projection? Or should I say the surface of his Astral Projection?

From the looks of it, he's really a Beyonder, and one that's apparently stronger than Old Neil. Klein analyzed as his mind was filled with questions. "Not necessary. It might have to do with this being a unique environment. It's only because this is my home ground that I'm able to see these things that Old Neil did not manifest."

He turned his head toward Justice again and confirmed that it was a characteristic only Beyonders possessed.

At that moment, Alger also completed his greetings.

Audrey drew a light gasp as she asked in anticipation, "Mr. Hanged Man, did you receive the box of Ghost Shark blood?"

Alger took a look at Klein and saw him tapping his glabella as though he was considering other matters.

"Thank you very much. It perfectly met my expectations. I never expected you to send it to me so quickly. The Ghost Shark blood is not the typical extraordinary creature," said Alger frankly.

Audrey smiled humbly and said, "I'm very happy to see this outcome."

As she loved anything to do with mystery from a young age, she had befriended those in aristocratic circles with similar interests. They had exchanged information, books, and rare artifacts among each other. But before this, none of them had ever obtained any supernatural power to become a real Beyonder. Instead, there were a few princes that hinted that they could gift her what she wanted if she became their princess consort.

However, she had obtained the Ghost Shark blood directly from her family's vault. After all, the inventory only stated 'one big bottle,' without mentioning how many milliliters or how full it had to be. She believed that pouring a little bit of it would go unnoticed. Even if there was an accident and the matter was exposed, her parents were unlikely to pursue the matter.

Alger looked deeply at The Fool who was enveloped in fog before turning his head back with a smile.

"According to our agreement, I will tell you the formula to the potion,

Spectator."

"Let me prepare myself. Alright, begin." Audrey inhaled as she focused her full attention.

"Low-Sequence potions are very easy to concoct. Just follow the order that I provide you. Do remember that there can be smaller quantities of the ingredients but not more. It would cause major problems. You should have heard about Beyonders losing control. I believe there's no need for me to repeat it?" Alger first mentioned things to take note of.

Audrey nodded gently and said, "I understand completely."

While she spoke, she turned her head to look at Mr. Fool. She wished to know if the mysterious powerhouse had anything to add; unfortunately, The Fool was sitting silently there like a statue.

Alger thought for a moment before saying, "Having smaller quantities does not mean it should deviate by too much… If you do not have an assistant, I suggest you spend some time familiarizing yourself with chemistry experiments."

"I have a family tutor for such matters," answered Audrey without feeling the burden.

After Alger mentioned the furthest extent of the deviation, he recited with great fluency, "Spectator. Sequence 9 potion. 80 milliliters of pure water. 5 drops of autumn crocus essence. 13 grams of cow teeth paeonol powder. 7 petals of elf flowers. A pair of matured Manhal Fish's eyeballs. 35 milliliters of goat-horned black fish blood.

"The final two items are the main ingredients. They are extraordinary creatures from the sea. You have to be careful."

"Alright." Audrey recalled and repeated, "80 milliliters of pure water. 5 drops of autumn crocus essence, 13 grams of cow teeth…"

"Paeonol powder," reminded Alger.

With his help, Audrey gradually and precisely memorized the formula's order. However, she appeared worried as she mumbled it

again and again.

"Do you know about Cogitation?" When Alger saw Justice nod, he continued, "I do not know how much you know about Cogitation. Let me describe it once… After consuming the potion, quickly begin Cogitation to control your spirituality and energy… Make sure to practice every day to truly grasp the powers of the potion. Dig out the meaning it symbolizes and even more of its mysteries. That way, you can avoid the danger of losing control to the greatest extent. And the meaning of a potion mainly lies in its name, such as Spectator!"

Klein silently listened to the conversation and had no plans on interrupting. All he did was secretly memorize and study, but when he heard that, he suddenly had a thought.

Audrey listened to The Hanged Man's explanations attentively, and just as she was about to inquire about something more detailed, she suddenly heard the rapping sound on the table,

She and Alger turned their heads and looked at The Fool. They realized that the mysterious and mighty figure was tapping gently with his fingers. He said in a deep voice, "It's not about grasping them, but rather digesting them.

"It's not about discovery, but rather acting.

"The name of a potion is not only symbolic, it's also imagery. It is the key to digesting."

Audrey was dazed and confused from hearing that. She was not very clear on what Mr. Fool was trying to express.

She subconsciously eyed The Hanged Man for a reaction from the corner of her eyes. She was surprised to see him jolt and freeze. It was as though an ordinary person had heard a loud and sudden clap of thunder.

"Digesting, acting… Digesting, acting… Digesting, acting, key…" Alger repeated it again and again softly as though he had grasped a key concept or had succumbed to a strange curse.

After a while, he raised his head and said with a hoarse voice, "Thank

you, Mr. Fool. Your hint is as valuable as my life. You have enlightened me greatly. Of course, I believe I have yet to fully understand or comprehend it."

Klein maintained his mysterious and unfathomable image by saying with a smile, "That was an advance payment."

In fact, he did not truly understand the exact meaning of what was said. He was just certain that Emperor Roselle was more powerful than the typical Beyonder and stronger than The Hanged Man."

Advance payment… Audrey looked at The Hanged Man's reaction and knew that the hint from before was precious. As she ruminated over it, she asked, "Mr. Fool, what do you wish for us to do?"

Opposite to her, Alger said with a nod, "What matter might you wish to entrust us with?"

Klein leaned back slightly as he glanced at the two of them before saying in a soft and pleasant voice, "Collect Roselle Gustav's secret diary on my behalf, even if it's just one page of it."

35: Exchange of Information

Roselle Gustav's secret diary?

Emperor Roselle?

Indeed, only such matters are worth the concern of a mighty figure like Mr. Fool… Audrey was first taken aback before she realized that she found it nothing surprising.

Rumor had it that Emperor Roselle had once seen the Blasphemy Slate. It was said that the secret cards he created hid the twenty-two paths of the divine. This was something every high-Sequence Beyonder would definitely pay attention to!

"Diary? That's a diary?" Alger frowned slightly as he keenly noticed this tidbit.

The item which Roselle Gustav had left behind had been described by Mr. Fool as a diary!

How did he know?

How did he determine it?

Could he know the way to decipher Roselle's cryptic text?

Faced with The Hanged Man's question and having obtained the desired effect, Klein leaned back into his chair and interlocked his hands. He answered in a relaxed manner, "Let us first view it as a diary for now."

He did not deny or confirm it.

Audrey had heard the children of other nobles mention the matter. However, she had never really learned much of it. With her curiosity piqued, she asked, "It's said that Emperor Roselle's, well, diary was written in a cryptic language or symbols he invented."

"Yes," answered Alger simply. "Some people believe that it is a unique set of symbols from mysticism. Others believe that it is a hieroglyph. But up to today, no one has found the correct way of deciphering it. At the very least, that's all I know."

With that said, he turned his head at Klein in a bid to get some confirmation or show his suspicions.

They are texts that have been passed down for generations, so are no longer in their original state. According to your line of thought, how can it be deciphered… Klein maintained his calm as he secretly gave a self-deprecating laugh.

As for how to handle the symbols of mysticism, he instantly thought of a ridiculous and funny scene.

Dressed in a black-pointed hat and long robe, an evil mage pulls up his sleeve to reveal a symbol tattooed on his arm. It was said that this was a symbol with mysterious power left behind by Emperor Roselle. They were written in two blue, large simplified Chinese characters:

"Retarded Joker!"

The corners of Klein's mouth curved up slowly as he found himself in a good mood.

After hearing The Hanged Man's description, Audrey said in a stumped manner, "We can't understand the symbols or the words… Then, how are we to pass the information to you, Mr. Fool? Or are we to mail it somewhere?"

This is quite an important question… I do not have the means to accept an item secretly… Klein was in no hurry to answer. He repeatedly released his thumbs from his interlocked hands before tapping them back again.

Soon, he thought of a solution.

Since I can create a divine palace and table here according to my wishes, would it be possible to project the content in the minds of others here?

I'll give it a try…

At that moment, Audrey and Alger saw Mr. Fool slowly sit up amid the thick grayish fog.

"Miss Justice, let us give it a try. Imagine a paragraph of text and give it the emotions of writing it with urgency. Yes, pick up the fountain pen beside you and write on the piece of paper."

Before Klein finished his sentence, Audrey saw a piece of yellowish-brown goatskin parchment and a dark red fountain pen in front of her.

She picked up the fountain pen both curiously and doubtfully. In accordance with the instructions, she imagined a poem Emperor Roselle once wrote:

"If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind[1]?"

After scrutinizing the text, she picked up her fountain pen and imbued them with the desire of projecting them out.

Klein sensed the emotions and using the fountain pen as a medium, he guided her.

The moment Audrey landed her fountain pen, she saw a line appear on the goatskin parchment.

"If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?"

"Goddess, how fascinating!" Audrey exclaimed in astonishment while feeling rueful.

Following that, she looked at Klein with some fear.

"Mr. Fool, can you read what I'm thinking?"

"No, I'm only guiding you. I simplified the process of writing for you and made it become an imprint. If you did not wish to express it,

nothing would appear." Klein placated her with a low tone.

"Is that so… Then we just need to memorize the symbols or the way the cryptic text looks and present it directly as we wish?" Audrey heaved a sigh of relief as she asked in enlightenment.

"Yes." Klein answered.

"That's not a bad method. Miss Justice, do not doubt your memory. After becoming a Spectator, you will receive immense improvement in this aspect." Alger had watched the attempt from the side, fully coming to the realization that The Fool was more powerful and mysterious than he imagined.

As for his memory, he believed that the next advancement would improve it sufficiently.

Regarding this, Audrey nodded in delight.

"You have delighted me with this reminder. Mr. Hanged Man, do you have any other guidance on Spectators?"

With that said, she looked toward the Seat of Honor.

"Mr. Fool, I will work hard to complete your mission. I will do my best to gather more of Emperor Roselle's secret diary."

"I mentioned before that I'm a person who likes a fair and equal exchange. The advanced payment I gave is only equivalent to two pages of the diary for each person. If there are more, I will give additional in return," Klein said calmly, like he was an adult who did not take advantage of children.

As for where the additional payment could come from, it was naturally from the newly acquired Emperor Roselle diary pages. This formed a virtuous cycle.

"You are truly a generous gentleman." Alger fell silent for a few seconds before bowing slightly with his hand by his chest.

After the bow, he turned to Justice and said, "Let me emphasize once more. A Spectator will forever be a spectator.

"I know that many Spectators enjoy imagining themselves to be the protagonist or some other character. As a result, they invest a lot of feelings into it, to the point of crying, laughing, raging, and turning sorrowful because of the drama. However, that is not what a Spectator should do.

"While faced with the various dramas of society and figures who knowingly or unknowingly act the role of particular characters, you have to maintain the attitude of being an absolute bystander. Only then can you calmly and objectively observe them. You will discover their habits, their tics from lying, or their scent of nervousness. From those minute clues, you can grasp their true thoughts.

"Believe me, everyone is different because of their emotions. They will secrete different 'things' and different smells. However, only a real Spectator can sniff it out.

"Once you invest too many of your emotions, your observation will be influenced. Your sensitivity towards the emotions of others will deviate."

Audrey listened attentively as her eyes brightened gradually.

"It sounds really, really interesting!"

Klein's heart stirred when he heard that.

The Spectator potion's requirement when summarized seemed to be "an absolutely objective and neutral spectator."

In a particular sense, it was equivalent to acting…

Acting?

Was this the 'acting' which Emperor Roselle was referring to?

Then, I will have to act as a Seer, and from there, digest the potion bit by bit?

Just as Klein was immersing himself in thought, Alger finished explaining the demands he knew of a Spectator. He sighed before saying, "It seems like there's nothing else?

"Perhaps we can have a casual chat. We can talk about things happening around us. Perhaps it is something very normal to you, but in the ears of others, it might be a very important clue."

"Sure." Klein snapped back and nodded slightly.

He was already planning to attempt to act as a Seer. After all, it did not seem like there were any negative effects from doing so.

"Then, shall we begin with you, Mr. Hanged Man?" Audrey agreed in excitement.

Alger thought for a moment before saying, "The infamous pirate who calls himself Admiral Ludwell has begun his voyage to explore the eastern end of the Sonia Sea again."

"Oh? The owner of the Black Tulip?" returned Audrey with a question after some thought.

"Yes," Alger replied with a nod.

I don't even know who that is… Klein listened silently while he pondered over the news he planned on sharing. It had to be something that did not expose him while also allowing him to gain feedback.

Soon, he decided. He maintained his unfathomable image as The Fool and caressed the side of the bronze table with his fingers.

"According to what I know, the Secret Order has lost an Antigonus family notebook."

This news was not only known by the Nighthawks from Tingen City. The Secret Order as well as Beyonders with close ties with them similarly knew.

"An Antigonus family notebook?" Alger repeated before smiling with a shake of his head. "I'm really curious as to what reaction the Church of Evernight will have if they learn of it."

Why would he mention the Church of Evernight? Klein acutely sensed a problem, but it was not appropriate for him to ask.

That would shatter his image as the mysterious and profound Fool.

At that moment, Audrey asked out of curiosity, "Why are you curious? What sort of special reaction would the Goddess's church have?"

Alger smiled and said, "The Antigonus family was destroyed by the Church of Evernight."

"I'm not really sure if it happened at the end of the Fourth Epoch or the early stages of the present epoch."

Wh— Klein's pupils constricted as a chill suddenly swept through him.

From the looks of it, the value the Nighthawks have placed on this Antigonus notebook far exceeds my imagination!

The reason why they nominated me as a Beyonder—having some contribution and to prevent danger to me are likely negligible reasons—is that they wish for me to raise my spiritual sensitivity to aid them in finding the notebook.

This was not kept from me by Captain. He had mentioned it, but I just didn't pay much attention to it…

After hearing The Hanged Man's explanation, Audrey said with deep interest, "I never imagined that such a thing would happen…

"Alright, my turn. Let me think of what I have to share."

She cocked her head and held her head up with her hand before chuckling.

"Yesterday, my etiquette teacher taught me how to faint, how to faint elegantly without any faux pas. It's a practical skill used at social events to avoid awkward situations or nasty guys… Heh heh. I was just organizing my thoughts. What I really wanted to say is that ever since the failure of the battle on Balam's eastern shore, the king, premier, and gentlemen are under immense stress. They eagerly wish to change."

1. Adapted from Ode to the Wind which is an ode, written by Percy Bysshe Shelley.

36: A Simple Question

While Audrey recalled the conversation between her father and elder brother about the situation, she put in her own words. "They believe that the government's structure is too chaotic. Every election, if there is a change of the ruling party, there will be a change of personnel from top to bottom. It makes things a mess and lowers efficiency tremendously. Not only does it cause battle losses, it also brings great inconvenience to the civilians."

Klein knew very well that as there was no example to reference, the Loen Kingdom had yet to evolve into a system that examined public servants. The political situation was still in its preliminary stages; therefore, after every election victory, many so-called positions would be awarded to members and supporters.

Hmm, Emperor Roselle not establishing such an institution in Intis does not match his personality… Could it be that he diverted his focus to other things later in life?

When The Hanged Man, Alger, heard that he interjected with a soft chuckle.

"They believe? Then their beliefs are a little slow. Perhaps they will only feel the itch a year after they get bitten by black mosquitoes."

Black mosquitoes were a type of creature that resided in the south of the Loen Kingdom. It was extremely venomous, and its venom made victims have the urge to rip apart their skin.

Audrey extended her palm and covered her mouth. Ignoring The Hanged Man's mockery, she expressed the core information of what she said, "Unfortunately, they are temporarily unable to find a good

solution to replace this system."

Klein listened carefully and felt that the topic was in the domain of his expertise. He smiled faintly and said, "This is a simple problem."

The Foodaholic Empire and the decadent countries that studied the Foodaholic Empire had very advanced experiences of success.

"Simple?" Audrey returned with a question in puzzlement.

Although her education did not include politics, she often heard from the discussions of her father, brother, and people around her. She had a sufficient understanding of similar matters.

Klein felt as though he had returned to the message boards of yesteryear. Composed, he said, "An examination, just like an entrance-examination for college. Hold an exam that is open to the public. It can be split into two rounds or three rounds. Use the most objective method to select the elite."

"But…" Audrey knew what sort of objection this would entail.

Before she had the chance to arrange her thoughts, Klein continued, "After which, use these elites to fill the positions of the Cabinet, the county government, the city government, and the various towns. Yes, the positions that are directly handling matters, such as the Secretary of the Cabinet.

"Different positions should be given different requirements. The second or third rounds can be tested based on locale and region. Professional matters should be left to the professionals.

"As for political positions such as ministers, governors or mayors, they will be left to the parties that win the election. That is a slice of the pie they deserve."

Alger, who lacked interest in such matters, unknowingly turned his head and listened carefully. Audrey frowned slightly as she fell into deep thought.

"There's no hurry in replacing everyone at once. The cabinet and various agencies in the civil service will be crippled if that happens.

You can have an examination every year or every three years. They can be gradually replaced. Finally, in light of the kingdom's expansion and the salaried civil servants' resignations that will bring in vacancies, you can systematically allot spots." Klein fully expressed his talent as a keyboard politician. He then faced his palm outwards and said, "Such a design can bring the kingdom's insightful elites into the government. Regardless of the party in power or who the minister is, the civil service will allow the kingdom to maintain its basic and effective operations."

Of course, a side effect was the birth of the undying devil that was bureaucracy.

While considering the suggestion, Audrey asked doubtfully, "Are you implying that even if those ministers become curly-haired baboons, the effects would be insignificant?"

"No," Alger interjected suddenly. "I believe that baboons are a better choice than the present ministers."

He paused before adding, "After all, baboons only need to eat, sleep, and mate. They would not come up with foolish ideas and insist on brainless projects."

Mr. Hanged Man, it sounds like you have quite a terrible superior… Klein sat at his seat of honor and shook his head in silent amusement.

Audrey ruminated over the suggestion Mr. Fool had offered and after a while, said in surprise, "It sounds like it actually might work…

"It's a very simple but effective solution!"

She looked at Klein and sincerely marveled, "Mr. Fool, you must be an elderly person with outstanding intelligence who is very experienced in life!"

… The corners of Klein's mouth twitched a little as he looked at The Hanged Man and Justice for a few silent seconds.

"Let us end today's gathering here."

If Miss Justice is able to influence her family and effect change on this

matter, I can guide Benson ahead of time and give him a chance at becoming a civil servant.

On careful thought, Benson is indeed suitable for such a career.

However, it is unlikely Justice would take the initiative to do it. This is because The Hanged Man and I can easily find out which noble suggested it and basically guess her identity.

Of course, she would do it secretly in a roundabout manner.

"By your will." Audrey and Alger stood up together.

Klein leaned back slightly and severed the connection. He saw Justice and The Hanged Man's illusory and blurry figures instantly shatter and dissipate.

Above the gray fog, in the opulent palace where gods seemingly lived, he was the only one sitting silently at the head of the bronze table.

Klein did not plunge into the gray fog like the other time to leave. This was because his mind was still energetic enough after becoming a Beyonder.

The reason why he had ended the Tarot Club early was because he learned the true attitude the Nighthawks had towards the Antigonus notebook. He decided that he had to search for it seriously and not sleep all the way. Doing so would make Dunn Smith suspicious of his activities at home.

Furthermore, he had benefited quite a lot this time.

Klein sat on the high-back chair at the head of the bronze table. His arms leaned on the armrest as he crossed his fingers while he observed the boundless gray fog carefully. He found the place serene as though no one had stepped into it for ten million years.

When he established the connection to summon The Hanged Man and Justice, he acutely noticed something.

That was the fact that as a Beyonder himself, he had the ability to

touch another dark red star!

Does this mean I can summon one more? Klein recalled the feeling and muttered in confirmation.

However, he did not have the urge to make an attempt since he did not know what the identity of the newcomer would be or what sort of attitude they would have. After all, not everyone was like Justice or The Hanged Man who had unique personalities that easily blended in and took whatever they needed. They even seemed willing to conceal matters. If he pulled someone like Dunn Smith, then the mysterious organization he had just established would instantly come under the watch of the church.

As an "evil" organization's boss, his future would be worrying.

Klein knew that the gray fog was special. He knew it was not something a Beyonder at Dunn Smith's Sequence could see through. But the problem was that since he had the powers of a Beyonder, he had to consider the existence of the gods.

Klein had chosen to carefully believe that the seven orthodox gods existed in reality. Of course, he was more tenable to the belief that these gods were just more powerful than High-Sequence Beyonders. Furthermore, They were under strict limitations. At the very least, ever since the Fifth Epoch, apart from a few revelations, They had not appeared again.

Heh, forcefully pulling people here isn't a good thing. No one would wish to be pulled into mystery for some baffling reason… Let's wait and see how things go in the future… Klein sighed and stood up.

He released his spirituality and sensed his body's existence. Then, he began imitating the heavy feeling of rapidly plunging down.

The scenes in front of him changed. The gray fog and dark red instantly departed him. Klein felt like he had torn through endless water membranes before ultimately seeing the real world, his room in darkness.

This time, he was fully awake and seriously took in the entire

experience.

Strange… There are some differences between the gray fog and the spirit world… Klein moved his limbs and felt the existence of his body.

After he seriously thought through the experience, he shook his head, walked to the desk and pulled open the curtains.

Whoosh!

The curtains were drawn as sunlight poured in, illuminating the room.

As he looked at the street outside the oriel window and the pedestrians going back and forth, Klein took a deep breath and muttered silently, *It's time to go out and work.*

How should I act as a Seer?

It cannot be rushed… All I can do is use Spirit Vision now…

…

Backlund, Empress Borough.

Audrey Hall looked at herself in the mirror. She saw her cheeks flushed red with excitement and her eyes, so bright that they would have daunted anyone from looking into them.

She did not examine any of this as she hurriedly recalled. She picked up the ruby-studded fountain pen and wrote the formula to the Spectator potion on the exquisite goatskin parchment.

"80 milliliters of pure water. 5 drops of autumn crocus essence, 13 grams of cow teeth paeonol powder. 7 petals of elf flowers. A pair of matured Manhal Fish's eyeballs. 35 milliliters of goat-horned black fish blood."

Phew… Audrey heaved a sigh of relief as she read it a few times to confirm that she had not made any mistakes.

She had the urge to dance again, but reminded herself to remain

restrained.

After some thought, she began writing various chemical names around the potion's formula. She then faked the page into complicated and messy chemistry.

Yes, as long as one doesn't read it carefully, a person who flips through this randomly will not discover the details I have hidden in here… Excellent! Audrey praised herself and turned her mind towards the acquisition of the materials.

I'll first search the few vaults we have. I'll then attempt to exchange for the missing parts with others…

If I still can't gather them all, I can only seek help from The Hanged Man or The Fool… What can I offer as payment?

After some thought, Audrey closed the notebook and placed it on a tiny bookshelf. Following that, she briskly walked to the door and pulled it open.

A golden retriever was sitting obediently outside.

The corners of Audrey's mouth curled as she revealed a radiant smile.

"Susie, you completed the mission perfectly!"

"In the serialized stories in the newspapers, detectives would often have a capable assistant. I think there should be a huge dog supporting a real Spectator~"

…

In an underground basement lit only by a flickering candle, Alger Wilson raised his palm and looked at it carefully.

After a long while, he let out a sigh.

It's still that miraculous. I was unable to figure out any specific details at all…

Despite having made sufficient preparations, he failed to understand

how The Fool had completed the summoning…

He moved his gaze down and looked at the goatskin parchment on the table in front of him.

At the title head of the yellowish-brown parchment, there was a Hermes sentence written in dark blue ink: "7. Seafarer."

37: The Club

Under the scorching afternoon sun, Klein left his house.

Since he had to walk all the way from Iron Cross Street to Welch's place, he wore a linen shirt instead of his formal attire of top hat and leather boots. He wore a matching brown coat, a round felt hat and a pair of old leather shoes. That way, he did not need to worry that the stench of his sweat would contaminate the rather expensive suit.

As he went down Daffodil Street, he strolled toward Iron Cross Street. When he passed by the square around the corner, he subconsciously took a glance.

The tents had already vanished. The circus troupe from before had left after finishing their performance.

Klein originally imagined the animal trainer who had helped him tell his fortune to be a hidden powerhouse. He believed she had purposely appeared to guide him after discovering something unique about him and that she would meet him and provide hints for the future. However, none of that happened. She left for the next stop in the tour with the circus troupe.

How can there be so many cliched tropes… Klein shook his head while grimacing a smile. He turned toward Iron Cross Street.

Iron Cross Street was not characterized by just a single street. Like its name suggested, it was formed by two roads that crossed each other.

With the intersection at its core, it was split into Left Street, Right Street, Upper Street, and Lower Street. Klein, Benson, and Melissa previously lived on Lower Street.

However, the residents living at his former apartment and the surrounding area did not think of the area as Lower Street. Instead, they created the term Middle Street. By doing so, they made a clear difference between those staying there and the poor who lived two hundred meters down the road.

There, a bedroom was occupied by five or six people, and sometimes even up to ten.

Klein walked along the periphery of Left Street as he let his mind wander. He recalled the Antigonus family's notebook and how it was missing. He thought of its importance to the Nighthawks and thought of the deaths that resulted from it.

His heart slowly turned heavy as his face turned ashen.

At that moment, a familiar voice sounded.

"Lad."

Oh… Klein turned his head curiously and found himself by Smyrin Bakery's entrance. Mrs. Wendy with a head of gray hair was greeting him with a wave and a warm smile.

"You don't look… very happy?" Wendy asked genially.

Klein rubbed his face and said, "A little."

"Regardless of your worries, tomorrow will always come," said Mrs. Wendy with a smile. "Here, try out my newly created sweet iced tea. I'm not sure if it suits the palate of the locals."

"Locals? Aren't you one, Mrs. Smyrin?" Klein shook his head in amusement.

Trying out something means it's free, right?

Wendy Smyrin raised her chin a little and said, "You guessed right. I'm actually a Southerner. I came to Tingen with my husband, but that was more than forty years ago. Heh heh, back then, Benson was not born yet. Even your parents did not know each other.

"I have always been a little unaccustomed to the dietary preferences of Northerners and I'm always missing my hometown's food. I miss pork sausages, potato bread, roasted pancakes, vegetables fried in lard, and roasted meat with specialty sauces."

"Oh, and I also miss sweet iced tea…"

Klein suffused a smile when he heard that.

"Mrs. Smyrin, this sure is a topic that makes me hungry… But I feel a lot better. Thank you very much."

"Delicacies can always cure sorrow." Wendy handed him a cup of brownish-red liquid. "This is sweet iced tea I made according to my memories. Try it and tell me if it's nice."

After thanking her, Klein took a sip and found it resembling iced black tea from Earth. However, it was not as stimulating. The taste of tea was stronger and felt more refreshing. It instantly expelled the heat brought by the burning sun.

"It's excellent!" he marveled.

"That puts me at ease." Wendy smiled with squinted eyes as she watched him finish the cup of tea in a genial manner.

After chatting with Mrs. Smyrin about his moving, Klein returned to the street he was most familiar with.

There were far fewer streetside hawkers in the afternoon. They gathered again after half past five. The ones that stayed behind looked drowsy and listless.

The moment he entered the area, Klein's heart suddenly felt overwhelmed by darkness. His heart felt heavy, down, and gloomy for an inexplicable reason.

What's happening? He sharply sensed something wrong about himself. He immediately stopped and observed his surroundings, but did not see anything strange.

After some thought, Klein raised his hand and tapped his glabella like

he was thinking.

The extent of his vision immediately transformed. The auras of the hawkers and pedestrians all appeared.

Before Klein could observe the colors of their health, his attention was pulled away by the colors that represented gloominess.

He was unable to determine the exact thoughts of the observed, but the despondent, apathetic, and gloomy impression was deeply carved into his heart.

As he surveyed the area, he realized that even the sun could not disperse those dark colors.

It was a sense of gloom that tainted them from years of repression.

Upon seeing this, Klein instantly understood the reason.

Just as Old Neil said, activating his Spirit Vision easily pulled him into unfamiliar environments and made him feel discomfort. It was also easy for him to be affected by the emotions of others.

A similar principle could be used on an ability like perception. This was an ability he obtained without additional practice after becoming a Seer. It was a passive sense that could not be declined. It allowed him to directly sense the existence of anything abnormal.

There was bound to be a level of interaction when perceiving things; therefore, in the Beyonder eyes of someone like a Spirit Medium, the intensity of everyone's perception was clear. It was like a fire in the night. Therefore, people with high perceptivity were naturally affected by the intense atmosphere of anything abnormal. It could only be repeatedly practiced to grasp, control, and adapt to such outcomes.

Such a repressed color is probably formed over extended periods of time, right? Klein sighed as he shook his head, feeling somewhat affected.

He tapped his glabella twice again and tried hard to converge his spirituality.

Tap. Tap. Tap. Klein walked toward the apartment and tried to sense any abnormal existences or tiny connections while also searching for the Antigonus family's notebook which "he" had hidden.

The streets were the same as usual. There was filthy water and trash on the streets. It only cleared up when he reached the apartment's entrance.

Klein pushed open the half-closed door and circled the first floor in the darkness that the sunlight could not reach.

The wooden stairs creaked constantly as he went up them.

The second floor was as dim as always. Klein released his perception and looked into the darkness.

However, not only did he fail to discover any clues regarding his notebook, he even failed to see any invisible spiritual bodies.

If it's so easy to encounter them, most ordinary people would have long sensed the existence of extraordinary matters… Klein sighed in reflection.

He had already understood that most "spirits" did not exist in the form of spiritual bodies, but in the form of spirituality. Only a Spirit Medium could effectively communicate with them.

After circling the third floor once, Klein left the apartment and retraced his memory's footsteps towards Welch's place.

He walked for a full hour but did not discover anything along the way.

Standing outside the gardened bungalow, Klein looked at the building through the locked iron gates and mumbled to himself, "There's no need for me to search Welch's place, right? Captain and Madam Daly must have done a carpet search of the place…

"Besides, I don't have the key. They can't expect me to climb the walls, right…

"I'll try another path tomorrow…

"I've walked so much today, but there are no step counter rankings…"

While lampooning, Klein returned to the nearby district. He planned on taking a public carriage to Blackthorn Security Company to retrieve his daily allocation of thirty bullets. He needed to make use of his time and practice.

A Seer's lack of quick and effective offensive means could only be made up with his revolver and cane!

The district around Welch's place was relatively clean. Shops with clean and bright windows lined the two sides of the street.

At the turn of the street, Klein was just about to seek out the carriage stop when his gaze swept past a few signboards on the second floor.

"Harrods Department Store."

"Military Veterans Mess."

"Divination Club."

…

Divination Club… Klein silently repeated the name and recalled that he had to 'act' as a Seer.

Yes, I should take a look… and seek out new ideas…

Amid his mixed thoughts, Klein went across the street and went to the second floor. He entered the main foyer to see a beautiful female attendant.

The woman with coiled brownish-yellow hair sized up Klein before saying with a smile, "Sir, do you wish to have your fortune told, or do you wish to join our club?"

"What are the conditions for entry?" asked Klein casually.

The woman explained with great familiarity, "Fill in your particulars and pay an annual membership fee. The first year is five pounds and subsequent years will be one pound a year. Don't worry, we are not

like political or business clubs which allow entry through recommendations from formal members.

"Members can freely use the club's meeting room and various divination rooms and tools. They can enjoy the coffee and tea we provide and read the newspapers and magazines we subscribe for free. They can buy lunch, dinner, and alcoholic beverages at cost price, as well as education materials and materials needed for divination.

"In addition, we invite at least one famous fortune-teller to lecture every month to answer any questions.

"Most importantly, you can find a bunch of friends with the same hobbies and have an exchange with them."

It sounds pretty good, but… I do not have the money… Klein gave a self-deprecating smile before asking, "Then what if I want my fortune told?"

38: Novice Hobbyist

Upon hearing Klein's question, the beautiful lady with elegantly tied-up brownish-yellow hair appeared to lose her patience. However, she maintained her smile and said, "Our members are free to do divination for others in the club. They also have their prices and we take a very tiny cut as a fee. If you wish to have your fortune told, you can take a look at this album. It has introductions and rates of the members who are willing to do divination for others."

"However, it's Monday afternoon, so most of our members are busy at work. We only have five here today…"

As she introduced the club, she invited Klein to have a seat on the sofa beside a window in the reception hall. Then, she flipped through the album and pointed out the present club members.

"Hanass Vincent. Famous Tingen fortune-teller. The club's resident mentor. Good at various forms of divination. He charges four soli each time."

It's really expensive… That's enough to feed Benson, Melissa, and me to two sumptuous dinners… Klein clicked his tongue silently and did not reply.

When the woman saw this, she continued flipping the page and introducing one member after another.

"…And the final one, Glacis. A member who joined the club this year. He is skilled in tarot divination. He charges two pence each time.

"Sir, who do you plan on choosing?"

Klein did not stand on ceremony and answered, "Mr. Glacis."

"…" The female attendant fell silent for two seconds before saying, "Sir, I have to remind you that Mr. Glacis is only considered a novice."

"I understand. I will be responsible for my own decision." Klein nodded with a smile.

"…Then please follow me." The woman stood up and led Klein through a door beside the reception hall.

It was not a very long corridor and an open meeting room was situated at its end. There was enough sunlight and it was equipped with tables and chairs. There were newspapers, magazines, and paper cards. A faint coffee aroma drifted out.

About two rooms from the meeting room, the attendant gestured for Klein to stop. She sped up her pace and entered the room. She shouted gently, "Mr. Glacis, someone wishes for your divination."

"Me?" A voice filled with surprise and doubt immediately sounded. Following that, there was the sound of a chair moving.

"Yes, which divination room would you like to use?" replied the lady without any emotion.

"Topaz Room. I like topaz." Glacis appeared by the meeting room's door and looked curiously at Klein who was waiting not far away.

He was a man in his thirties; his skin was slightly dark and his pupils were a dark green shade. Under his light, yellow and soft hair, he was dressed in a white shirt and black vest. A monocle hung from his chest and he seemed to have a good disposition.

The attendant did not say anything further as she opened the door to the Topaz Room which was next to the meeting room.

The curtains inside were tightly shut, making it dim. It appeared that only by doing so would one gain revelations from the gods and spirits to obtain an accurate divination outcome.

"Hello there. I'm Glacis. I never expected you to choose me for your divination." Glacis gave a gentleman's bow, briskly stepped into the

room, and sat behind a long table. "Frankly, I'm only attempting divination for others. I do not have much experience. For now, I'm not a good fortune-teller. You still have a chance for regret."

After Klein returned the bow, he entered and closed the door behind him.

By the light seeping through the curtains, he said with a smile, "You are a really honest man, but I'm someone who is very firm on his choices."

"Please have a seat." Glacis pointed at the seat in front of him and thought for a few seconds. "Divination is my hobby. Heh heh. In life, one often receives guidance from the divine, but the ordinary person is unable to accurately understand the meaning. This is the reason why divination exists and also why I joined this club. In this aspect, I still lack confidence. Let's make the divination that follows an exchange, a free exchange. How do you like my suggestion? I'll cover the fees the club requires. It's just a quarterpence."

Klein did not agree or shake his head. Instead, he smiled.

"From the looks of it, you have a pretty well-paying and decent job."

While he said so, he leaned his body forward slightly. He held his forehead with his right fist and tapped at it twice.

"But that does not enhance the accuracy of my divination," answered Glacis humorously. "Does your head hurt? Do you want to divine problems regarding health?"

"A little. I wish to divine where an item is." Klein had already thought of an excuse as he slowly leaned back.

In his eyes, Glacis's aura clearly presented itself. The orange colors by his lungs were dark and sparse. They even influenced the brightness in other areas.

This is not a symptom of exhaustion… Klein nodded in an indiscernible manner.

"Are you searching for a lost item?" Glacis thought for a few seconds

before saying, "Then let's do a simple determination."

He pushed the neatly stacked tarot cards on the black table toward Klein.

"Calm down. Think of that item and ask yourself 'can it still be found.' While doing so, shuffle and cut the deck."

"Alright." Klein actually did not remember what the ancient notebook looked like. All he could do was repeat the question to himself: *Can the Antigonus family's notebook still be found?*

While he repeated the thought, he skillfully shuffled and cut the deck.

Glacis picked the topmost card and pushed it in front of Klein. The card was facing down horizontally.

"Turn it clockwise until it sits vertical. Then flip it open. If the card is inverted, which means the picture on the card is facing away from you, it indicates that the item cannot be found. If the card is upright, then we can continue the divination and seek its actual location."

Klein followed his instructions and turned the horizontal card vertical.

He clasped the end of the tarot card and flipped it over.

It was an inverted card.

"What a pity." Glacis sighed.

Klein did not respond because his attention was focused on the tarot card in front of him.

The inverted card's picture was dressed in gorgeous clothes and splendid headdress—The Fool!

It's The Fool again? It can't be so coincidental, right… According to The Hanged Man and Old Neil, divination is the outcome of the communication of spirituality and the spirit world with a higher-dimensional "me." Tarot cards are only a convenient tool to read what the

truth symbolizes. In theory, using any divination item doesn't matter as it doesn't affect the outcome… Klein frowned as he thought for a moment.

"Can it be divined whether the item is already in the hands of others?"

"Of course. Follow the same procedure and do it again." Glacis nodded with rich interest.

Klein shuffled and cut the deck while thinking of his question.

He drew a card and placed it horizontally before turning it vertical clockwise. He finished all the preparations with a serious expression.

Taking a deep breath, Klein reached out his hand and flipped over the tarot card.

Please do not be The Fool again…

While praying, he suddenly relaxed because the card was that of The Star and it was inverted!

"From the looks of it, the item has not been taken by others yet," interpreted Glacis with a smile.

Klein nodded and raised his right hand. He tapped his glabella, looking as though he was deep in thought. Then, he took out two pennies with a dark copper luster from his pocket and pushed it towards Glacis.

"Didn't I say it was free?" Glacis said with a frown.

Klein laughed as he got up.

"This is the respect divination deserves."

"Alright, thank you for your generosity." Glacis stood up and reached out his hand.

After shaking his hand, Klein took two steps back and turned around. He walked to the door and twisted the doorknob.

Just as he was about to leave, he suddenly turned his head and made a terse sound.

"Mr. Glacis, I suggest that you see a doctor as soon as possible. Focus on your lungs."

"Why?" asked Glacis in surprise.

Are you cursing me because you aren't pleased with the divination results?

Klein thought for a moment before saying, "It's a symptom based on the color of your face. You, well… your glabella seems dark[1]."

"Glabella seems dark…" It was the first time Glacis was hearing such a description.

Klein did not explain further as he walked out the room with a smile. He closed the wooden door behind him.

"Is he an unlicensed doctor or a herbalist?" Glacis shook his head, amused. He then picked up his monocle for divination.

On careful look, he realized his glabella was indeed dark.

But this was a problem of the environment. In the darkness due to the closed curtains, not only was his glabella dark, his entire face was shrouded in darkness!

"It's not a very likable joke." Glacis muttered.

He worriedly divined his own health to make sure that everything was alright.

…

After leaving the Divination Club, Klein had an additional plan for the future.

It was to save as much money as possible to pay the annual fee to become a member of the club. After which, he could begin acting as a Seer.

As for why he did not choose to do it independently, it was because he temporarily lacked the resources and channels. He could not bring himself to stand on the streets as a hawker since he cared for his reputation.

A few minutes later, the public carriage arrived. He spent two pence and reached Zouteland Street which was not very far off.

He pushed open the door to Blackthorn Security Company but did not see the familiar brown-haired girl. He only saw the black-haired, green-eyed Leonard Mitchell with his poetic bearing behind the reception counter.

"Good afternoon. Where's Rozanne?" Klein asked after taking off his hat and bowing.

Leonard smiled and pointed at the partition.

"It's her shift tonight at the armory."

Without waiting for Klein to ask another question, Leonard said as though he was pondering over a matter, "Klein, I have a question that has always puzzled me."

"What is it?" Klein wore a blank look.

Leonard stood up and smilingly said with a relaxed tone, "Why did Welch and Naya commit suicide on the spot while you returned home?"

"It likely has to do with how the unknown existence made me take the Antigonus family's notebook away to hide it," answered Klein with the official surmise.

Leonard paced around before turning to look straight into Klein's eyes.

"If your suicide was meant to silence you and wipe out any clues, why weren't you made to destroy the notebook there and then?"

1. This is a classic Chinese saying to someone. It usually implies an ominous portent.

39: Interesting Trick

In fact, I do not know if the notebook is destroyed or hidden… but by using backward reasoning, if it is to be destroyed, it could have been done on the spot. There was no need for me to take it away to carry out the destruction…

Upon hearing Leonard's question, Klein instantly went into keyboard detective mode and said with a sigh, "Perhaps when Welch, Naya, and I made contact with the unknown existence, it enjoyed the sacrifice of life or wished for similar situations to continue. With the suicide definitely easily discoverable, I was made to take away the notebook to hide it so as to prepare for the existence's second round of entertainment. However, some mishap happened during the process and I failed to succeed in my suicide."

This was a reasoned guess Klein made from his consumption of novels, movies, and TV dramas which involved cult sacrifices.

As for the mishap that happened midway, he knew very well that it was due to the unexpected variable of him being a transmigrator.

"Quite a good explanation, but I believe there might be other possibilities. Welch's and Naya's suicide sacrifice might have made it possible for the unknown existence to descend on this world. Then, that notebook is a vessel or a breeding ground for evil. It made you take it away to hide it, worried that we would destroy it if we discovered its birth—before it became strong." Leonard Mitchell suggested another possibility.

Having said that, he stared into Klein's eyes and smiled slightly.

"Of course, perhaps the notebook has been destroyed. The goal is to

hide its content, to conceal the vessel or the brooding of evil. That way, there is a sufficient reason for your failed suicide."

What does he mean? Is he suspecting me? Is he suspecting that the original Klein's body is a vessel or used for the brooding of evil? No, what he's being a vessel for is a transmigrator… Actually, "Brooding" isn't a correct term. Klein was taken aback. While he secretly criticized the idea, he weighed his words.

"I will not try to defend myself since I've lost memories from that period. Be it Captain or Madam Daly, they have already confirmed that I'm fine. Your joke isn't funny."

"I'm only considering a possibility. It does not eliminate the blow the unknown existence encountered when it descended which caused your suicide to fail. We believe that the Goddess will ultimately bless us." Leonard laughed as he changed the subject. "Did you discover anything in the afternoon?"

After the conversation and the previous encounters, Klein was very wary of Leonard. He answered in a composed manner, "No. I plan on trying a different route tomorrow afternoon."

He pointed to the partition and said, "I'll need to head to the armory to draw the bullets."

The Shooting Club opened to nine at night. After all, many of its members only had the time after getting off work.

"May Goddess bless you." Leonard smiled as he gestured the sign of the crimson moon on his chest.

He watched Klein pass through the partition and listened to his footsteps down the stairs. Leonard's smile gradually vanished as a look of doubt appeared in his green eyes.

He whispered something with a displeased tone.

…

Down the stairs, Klein followed the gas lamp-illuminated corridor to the armory and archives.

The iron door was open and the brown-haired Rozanne was standing in front of the table. She was chatting with a top hat-wearing middle-aged man with a thick black beard.

"Good afternoon, no. Good evening. It's always night here. Klein, I heard from Old Neil that you have become a Beyonder? It's called Seer?" Rozanne turned her head and deluged him with her questions.

She did not hide her curiosity and concern.

Klein nodded with a smile.

"Good afternoon, Miss Rozanne. It's indeed always night here, but it makes one feel a sense of serenity. The description you gave wasn't accurate enough. It should be said that the Sequence potion I consumed has the name Seer."

"You still chose to become a Beyonder after all…" Rozanne said with a sigh as she fell into a deep thought.

Klein looked at the middle-aged man beside her and asked politely, "You are?"

Another Nighthawk member or one of the other two civilian staff I have not met?

Rozanne puckered her lips and said, "Bredt. Our colleague. He wishes to change slots with me to free up the night after tomorrow. He plans on going to the theater in the North Borough with his wife to watch The Prideful One. It's to celebrate their fifteenth-year wedding anniversary. He's truly a romantic gentleman."

Bredt smiled as he extended his hand and said, "With Miss Rozanne around, there's nothing that requires repeating. Hello, Klein. I never expected you to become a Beyonder so quickly. As for me, heh, I might never have the courage."

"Perhaps it's as the saying goes, the ignorant know no fear," Klein said in a self-deprecating manner as he extended his hand to shake Bredt's.

"Me not having courage is not something bad," said Bredt with a

shake of his head. "A Beyonder once told me before his death to never probe strange and dangerous matters. The less you know, the longer you live."

At that moment, Rozanne interjected, "Klein, there's no need to mind it. I heard from Old Neil that as a Seer, you are used as support. It's relatively safe as long as you do not attempt to communicate with unknown existences. Why are you dressed in such clothes? It's so unbecoming of a gentleman! What are you here for?"

"I'm here to draw my thirty bullets." Klein did not reply to Rozanne's first question.

He believed that the lady would quickly forget the matter.

"Alright." Rozanne pointed at the table and said, "Bredt, it's all yours. You should know where the keys and bullets are. Oh, Old Neil really is petty. He did not even leave his hand ground coffee behind. He promised me that I could drink my fill today…"

She prattled on as Klein received the bullets.

The duo left together and went their separate ways at Zouteland Street. One took a public carriage home while the other walked into the Shooting Club.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Klein repeated the process—gripping the gun, raising his arms, shooting, releasing the cylinder, ejecting the empty shells, and stuffing in rounds—again and again. He became familiar with the process and built it into his muscle memory.

Of course, he had a few breaks in between to review and correct the process.

After finishing his practice, Klein used the grounds to do various exercises like push-ups. He worked hard to train his body to improve his physique.

Once everything was over, he sat in an untracked carriage home. Only then he realized it was nearing seven and the sky was already

dark.

Just as Klein was planning to head to the market or streets to buy the ingredients for dinner, the door opened. Melissa had returned with her stationery-filled bag.

Apart from that, she carried quite a lot of groceries.

"…I thought you and Benson would be home rather late. This morning, I took out 1 soli from the place where you stash your money." Upon seeing her brother's questioning look, Melissa explained in her usual serious manner.

"Since you took the money, why didn't you take the public carriage to school?" Klein had been reminded of the matter from the morning.

Melissa said with a frown, "Why should I take a public carriage. It costs four pence to get to school. A return trip means eight pence. Counting Benson and you, we will be spending twenty-four pence on transportation daily. That's a whole two soli! In a week, yes, without counting Sunday, that's still twelve soli. It's almost equal to our rent."

Stop, stop, stop! Don't flaunt your mathematical prowess… Klein lowered his palm in an amused manner.

Melissa first stopped before adding, "It's pretty good walking to school. Our teacher said that everyone should exercise frequently. Besides, I can pick some damaged components on the way."

Klein chuckled and said, "Then let's do the math again. The public carriage costs twelve soli. The rent is twelve soli and three pence. It's a total of one pound, four soli and three pence. Using Benson's salary is enough to pay for it and there will be quite a bit of change left. Yes, he received last week's salary… As for me, I can still earn one pound ten soli every week. Even if we eat meat every day while counting expenses like gas, charcoal, wood, and condiments, we would still have some left if we are frugal with lunch. We can even subscribe to the morning papers for just one penny."

"In two months, when I make up for the advanced payment, I can save money for both you and Benson. We can have new clothes."

"But! But we have to think of the possible accidents." Melissa stayed firm on her point.

Klein smiled at her and said, "Then, we can eat less meat. Don't you find spending fifty, no, a hundred minutes on the road a waste of time? You could use that time to read more and think over problems and improve your results.

"That way, Melissa, you will graduate with excellent grades. You will be able to find a job with a pretty good salary. When that happens, what is there to worry about?"

"…"

He fully displayed his experience gained from debating with people on message boards and finally convinced Melissa. She agreed to take the public carriage to school.

Phew, I've finally suckered her into doing it. No, how can I call it suckering. This is called convincing… Klein lampooned before taking over the groceries that Melissa had bought. He said with a sigh, "Remember to buy beef or meat like mutton and chicken… Eat until you're full and enjoy yourself. Only then will you be equipped with a healthy body and a clever brain to match the demanding requirements needed for your studies."

Just mentioning it makes me salivate…

Melissa puckered her lips and after a few seconds of silence, said, "Alright."

…

The next morning, after ensuring that Melissa took a public carriage, Klein and Benson separated and went to their respective companies.

The moment Klein stepped into the door, he saw Old Neil and Rozanne chatting by the reception desk. The former was still in his classic black robe, without any concern for the gazes of others. The latter had changed into a casual cream-colored dress.

"Good morning, Mr. Neil, Miss Rozanne," greeted Klein as he took off

his hat.

Old Neil gave him a mischievous look.

"Good morning, you did not hear anything you shouldn't have heard last night, right?"

"No, I slept very well." Klein was also quite puzzled over that.

He could only put it down to his inadequate perception…

"Haha, don't mind that. Actually, it's not that easily heard." Old Neil pointed to the partition and said, "Go to the armory. We will continue our mysticism lessons this morning."

Klein nodded and followed Old Neil down the stairs and arrived at the armory to replace Bredt who had been on duty the entire night.

"What will we be learning today?" asked Klein curiously.

Old Neil dragged out his response and said, "The complicated and basic knowledge. But before that, let me teach you an interesting trick."

He pointed at the silver chain on his wrist. There was a pure moonstone hanging from the chain.

40: Mysticism Curriculum

"An interesting trick?"

Klein asked out of extreme curiosity.

Old Neil chuckled and said, "I'll complete my patrol of the armory, storeroom, and archives. Use the two cups on the table to make two cups of coffee. In one of the cups, put something unpleasant. As for what it is, you can decide for yourself. Use your imagination. The only request from me is to not waste too much coffee powder. Those are coffee beans grown on the Feynapotter plateau and hand ground by me!"

"Alright." Although Klein was unsure what Old Neil was up to, he happily agreed to it.

He watched him open the iron gates to the armory with a copper key and then heard the echoing footsteps inside. Slowly, he settled the cups down and confirmed that there was still hot water in the kettle.

He removed the silver tin can's lid and using a tiny spoon with a metallic sheen, Klein scooped a spoonful of rich aromatic coffee powder into each of the two cups. Then, he poured in the hot water and stirred it.

As a transmigrator who came from an era abundant in resources, he was no stranger to coffee. However, it was only limited to instant coffee.

After finishing the task, Klein pondered for a moment and sat down. He crossed his right leg and took some of the mud which had stained the bottom of his leather boots and placed it in the left cup.

Then, he carefully stirred it again until the colors and smells of the two cups of coffee were practically indistinguishable.

A few minutes later, Old Neil walked out the armory while swinging his keys. He then closed the iron gates with a clang.

"Are you done?" He turned his slightly turbid dark red eyes over and looked at Klein across the table.

"Yes," replied Klein with a nod.

Old Neil chuckled and removed the silver chain around his wrist and sat down.

His expression quickly turned serene. He held out his chain-holding left hand and allowed it to hang over the coffee cup to his right. The moonstone nearly touched the liquid.

Amid the relaxing calmness, the moonstone trembled suddenly. It began spinning the chain in a counterclockwise manner.

"This cup is the one with the unpleasant thing," said Old Neil surely.

Without waiting for Klein to confirm, he put away the silver chain and picked up the other cup of coffee and took a sip.

"Do you like bitter coffee? I'm used to having a tablespoon of sugar and a tablespoon of milk."

Klein did not reply but instead asked with his interest piqued, "Your divination sure is accurate. Was it because of the moonstone? That was moonstone, right?"

"This is known as pendulum dowsing in divination. It's also called spirit dowsing. It relies on your Astral Projection's connection with the spirit world and the cosmos to communicate with spiritual intelligence through the aid of natural materials such as crystals, gems, or special metals. The good and bad of things can be divined… Let's talk about the two cups of coffee. A counterclockwise motion implies bad, while a clockwise motion is good. If it doesn't move, it's neither good nor bad. You can write the statement on a piece of paper. Take note, it's a statement and not a question." Old Neil put

down the cup of coffee and explained in detail.

Klein asked as though he was thinking, "Does that mean one shouldn't use questioning sentences?"

"Yes, you cannot use "is so-and-so willing to be my fiancée,' but you should instead use 'so-and-so is willing to be my fiancée.' Write it on a piece of paper and place it on the desk. Then use your non-dominant hand to hold the pendulum chain. Take note, use your non-dominant hand," said Old Neil with a chuckle. "When doing so, keep your arm straight. Adjust the chain's length and make the moonstone hang just above the piece of paper to the point of almost touching what we wrote. Then, close your eyes and repeat the sentence seven times in your mind. Open your eyes when you are done and see if the spirit pendulum turns or not. If it doesn't, close your eyes again and repeat the process until it moves."

Klein nodded slightly and asked, "Counterclockwise means 'no,' and clockwise means 'yes?'"

"It can also be interpreted as success or failure," corrected Old Neil. He taught Klein the other usages and details of spirit pendulum divination.

Klein pondered over the matter and discovered that it was a very useful divination trick. For instance, he could quickly use it in an unfamiliar environment to determine if the food he was offered was poisonous or not. He did not need any additional knowledge of field biology.

Of course, such divination methods were overly simple. The answers he could receive were limited to two or three. There was no way for deeper investigation or interpretation. For example, although something could be harmful to the body, it could become very beneficial after some processing. An example was certain foods. They were indeed damaging to the body, but nothing serious. If one was on the brink of starving, eating it would not be a huge problem. These were things that spirit dowsing could not determine.

"I will have to quickly save money to buy crystals or pure silver to create a spirit pendulum…" Klein sighed.

Old Neil looked at him in puzzlement.

"You can apply for one directly. This is a standard issue for Beyonders, especially Beyonders like us who take on a support role. There's still a topaz and pure silver spirit pendulum in the armory."

"But I'm still not a formal member of the team…" Klein's heart palpitated in excitement, but he felt a little hesitant.

Old Neil chuckled and said, "For Beyonders, regardless of whether they are formal members or not, they have to be provided with conveniences in other areas since there's no pay rise."

"Maybe the word 'perk' is more suitable. I'll apply with Captain later!" Klein clenched his fists secretly as he made up his mind.

How am I to know if the Captain would approve my request without trying?

"Alright," said Old Neil with a smile. "We can officially begin our mysticism curriculum. The basics consist of symbolism. Do you know what symbolism means?"

Klein recalled the bits and pieces he had heard and the things he had seen and heard from his spirit world and the gray fog. He deliberated and said, "Regardless of the spirit world or the illusory cosmos, as well as the unknown realms, they are beyond our sensory world. It's not something that can be accurately described by the information our ears, nose, and eyes obtain. What we obtain are simply indescribable experiences and direct revelations. They also appear as abstract characters or pictorial symbols. These symbols represent different items and different meanings."

"Very accurate. As expected of a Seer." Old Neil nodded solemnly. "Only by grasping the ability to interpret the symbols can you really take the next step into the world of mysticism. Yes, the pictures on tarot cards and each of the elements in the pictures are symbols. They are man-made symbols that help us understand and interpret primordial revelations."

He pulled out a piece of paper and picked up a fountain pen beside

him. He drew a short curve.

Following that, he added a few vertical lines beneath the curve. He looked up at Klein and asked, "Do you know what this symbol represents?"

Klein looked at it for quite a while before saying hesitatingly, "Eyelashes?"

"…" Old Neil exhaled. "This is the symbol of the Bumper Harvest constellation. This is the Thunderous constellation, and this is the Frost constellation…"

He casually drew a few more symbols.

As Klein memorized them, he could not help but comment, "The names of these constellations are really… especially unsophisticated. Yes, unsophisticated!"

How tacky and primordial…

Old Neil revealed a smile.

"Emperor Roselle thought the same back then. He always had the intention of changing the constellation names to things like Virgo, Cancer, and Scorpio. Unfortunately, he did not have the strength to go against tradition. At the very least, these constellations' old names and the corresponding dates that they represent guide farming and harvests."

"I have to say that Emperor Roselle sure is a person with ideas." Klein was at a loss for words.

Right, Emperor Roselle must have undoubtedly been quite the upstanding "gentleman" in life…

Old Neil was unable to understand Klein's humor as he continued explaining the various basic symbols, such as the various constellations, the sun, the crimson moon, the Brown Planet, the Scarlet Planet, and the Blue Planet.

While talking about these, he would teach Klein how to draw the

divination astrolabe and indicate what things to pay attention to. He also taught the materials and creation of a crystal ball, and the choice of incantations. The teachings overwhelmed Klein.

If not for his discovery that the Seer potion had improved his memory slightly, he would have long asked Old Neil to stop to aid his digesting of the information.

"That's all for today's mysticism class. Think over it yourself and ask me if you have any questions." Old Neil took out a gold pocket watch and opened it with a snap to check the time. "Do not forget to read the historical documents I prepared for you. To be frank, I feel fear seeing them."

"Alright." Klein took the pieces of paper that were sketched with symbols by Old Neil. He quickly went through the mysticism knowledge he learned today to prevent himself from forgetting it.

Old Neil took a sip of a newly brewed cup of coffee and said, "Memorization itself won't do. You have to use it often. That way, you can make the knowledge instinctual. Also, Cogitation has to be carried out every day. Only more practice and usage will allow you to grasp the power of the potion, digging into the mysteries it hides away and removing its unpleasant effects.

With this raised, Klein recalled acting and the Divination Club. He probed, "My potion's abilities are related to divination. Practicing by myself will not do. I need to make contact with lots of people and divine for them to quickly grasp it. I plan on joining the Divination Club after having some spare cash—the one on Howes Street in North Borough—to become a real Seer."

This was not something he could hide from the Nighthawks in the future. It was better to prepare them.

"Your idea is very similar to Daly's. She has always clamored to be a real Spirit Medium." Old Neil shook his head and laughed. "But why must you wait till you have spare cash? You can apply to Dunn and get him to approve of the expenses!"

"Organizations like a Divination Club might also have cultists or

members of evil organizations in them. As a civilian staff member of the Nighthawks and a standard Beyonder, your membership makes it easy for us to monitor them. It's part of the job! We would regularly monitor these places, but as we lack manpower, we can't keep watch on them for long. Now, it can be handed to you."

I can do that? As he looked at Old Neil's serious expression, Klein was dumbfounded.

This is making an expense claim for private matters!

I know nothing about such matters…

Indeed, I'm just a keyboard warrior…

"You wish to use your own money to do this?" Old Neil smiled as he added when he saw Klein's face.

Klein immediately shook his head as he answered firmly, "I plan on informing the Captain of this matter!"

Old Neil nodded in satisfaction and looked at the cup of coffee with the unpleasant thing inside. It had not been poured away.

"What did you put in there?"

Klein smiled embarrassingly.

"It's just some dirt underneath my boots. Its color and your coffee powder looks almost the same."

Old Neil was taken aback as he suddenly clasped his mouth and roared, "Why aren't you pouring it away yet!?"

41: Audrey and Her Susie

After pouring away the coffee and returning to the armory to take the thick stack of historical materials and explanatory transcripts from Old Neil, Klein followed the wall of lights up the staircase to the Blackthorn Security Company.

Tap. Tap. Tap. His footsteps echoed in the sealed and quiet basement.

After Klein left the spiral staircase, he pushed open the door and identified his bearings before heading for the second office opposite of him.

After familiarizing himself for two days, he had a general understanding of the layout of the Blackthorn Security Company.

The entrance brought visitors to a huge reception hall with sofas and tables. Through the partition, there was an inner region. To the left of the corridor were three rooms. From the nearest to the furthest, they were Mrs. Orianna's account room, a rest room with a few sofa beds, and the staircase that led underground.

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42: Butler Klee

A mission request… You probably came to the wrong place… This security company's signboard is really nothing but a signboard…

Klein immediately held back his urge to lampoon when he heard the visitor. How he yearned for there to be a message board and a screen for him to share his thoughts.

But he soon realized that he had once asked a similar question. The captain's answer was that they could take on jobs if they were free. The money earned could be used as funding for the team's petty cash account and bonuses for the participants.

Rozanne's eyes darted around as she thought for a moment before saying, "Our security personnel are all out on missions. The fastest it will take for them to return is an hour. If your matter isn't urgent, you can consider our services."

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43: Search

While looking at Klein, Leonard smiled and nodded.

"Then, do you need anything from them?"

He had cooperated with Old Neil and company numerous times, so he naturally knew that divination required a medium, especially when the person being divined was not present.

Klein thought for a moment before saying to Klee, "I need some of Elliott's recent clothes which have not been washed or starched. It would be better if you have any accessories he used to wear on him."

He tried to choose ordinary mediums, not something that would normally invite questions.

But even so, Klee wore a look of puzzlement.

"Why?"

After his question, he added, "I have a picture of Young Master Elliott on me."

Why? Because we are divining his location… Klein was momentarily at a loss for an answer.

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44: Fate

Leonard's singing sounded like a lullaby as it lightly resounded through the doors and into the winding wooden stairwell.

Klein's mind immediately turned torpid. He felt like he saw a silent moonlight and serene rippling lake.

His eyelids rapidly turned heavy as if he were about to fall asleep standing.

Amid these indistinct sensations, he also felt a strange, formless, and indifferent focus on his back. It felt like he was wandering the spirit world himself.

A baffling sense of déjà vu suffused as Klein suddenly found his train of thought once again. With his strong spiritual perception and extreme familiarity with Cogitation, he barely escaped the influence of the Midnight Poem.

However, he remained serene and could hardly evoke any emotions.

Soon, Leonard stopped singing as he turned his head with a smile.

"I'm considering asking Captain's permission to apply for a Feynapotter lute. How can there not be an accompaniment when singing?

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45: Returning

The Antigonus notebook is in the apartment across the kidnappers'!

Although it was very coincidental, Klein believed that his intuition was correct.

He immediately got out of bed and rapidly changed out of the old clothes he usually wore to bed. He picked up a white shirt beside him and draped it on, quickly buttoning from top to bottom.

One, two, three… He suddenly realized that he was "missing" buttons. The left and right sides did not seem to match.

On careful look, Klein realized that he had made a mistake buttoning the first button, causing the shirt to warp.

He shook his head helplessly before taking a deep breath and slowly breathing out, using some of his Cogitation techniques to restore his calm.

After putting on his white shirt and black trousers, he barely managed to wear his underarm holster steadily. He pulled out the revolver he hid under his soft pillow and holstered it.

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46: Portrait

Eugh! Eugh!

Klein squatted there, vomiting involuntarily. He was soon done with his puking since he did not eat breakfast.

At that moment, a tin-colored square flask that looked like a cigar box appeared in front of him.

The mouth which had lost its stopper emitted a mixture of smells akin to tobacco, disinfectant, and mint leaves. It cleared up Klein's nose and rejuvenated him.

The pungent smell continued to linger, but Klein no longer felt nauseous. He soon stopped vomiting.

He traced the tiny flask up and saw a pale hand that did not seem to belong to a member of the living. He saw the mouth of a black trench coat's sleeve and saw Corpse Collector Frye with his cold and dark bearing.

"Thank you." Klein recovered completely and with his hands on his knees, he stood back up.

Frye nodded without any expression.

"It'll be fine once you are used to it."

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47: Old Neil's Lack of Money

Old Neil rubbed his temples and said, "I believe we have a general idea of why the three of you engaged in a mass suicide. That notebook is also now purportedly in Ray Bieber's hands. Furthermore, the matter has already been exposed. Regardless of whether you are alive or dead, it will hardly influence any subsequent developments. I think—I believe that the surreptitious existence or mysterious power that caused all of this will not pay you any special attention. It's just like how you would not pay attention to the ants on the ground. Heh heh, as long as you do not try to make Him recall you.

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48: Hanass Vincent

In the Divination Club situated at the second floor of 13 Howes Street, North Borough of Tingen City.

Klein saw the beautiful lady that attended to visitors once again.

She was still having her brownish-yellow long hair coiled, making her look mature and elegant. It was hard to tell her age.

"Hello, Mr. Glacis isn't here today. Would you like to change fortune-tellers today?" said the beautiful lady with a smile.

Upon hearing that, Klein, who had just taken off his silk hat and put it back on, was immediately surprised.

"You still remember me?"

That was already five days ago!

The woman puckered her lips into a smile.

"You are the first customer that sought Mr. Glacis's services. You are also the only one to this very day. It's hard for me not to have a deep impression of you."

Is this the image of me being penny-wise, pound-foolish? Klein lampooned himself as he deliberated a question.

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49: Divination Art

As a Seer who had just stepped through the gates of mysticism, Klein did not dare to claim he knew much. However, he was certain he knew more than ordinary people. He was aware that the various kinds of divination arts could be split into three categories based on particular standards.

And that standard was based on the source of the revelation!

The first category of divination included tarot, poker, pendulums, dowsing canes, and dreams. By using the inquirer's own spirituality and its communication with the spirit world to gain a revelation, it could be interpreted for an answer. However, spirit pendulums and dowsing canes had very high requirements of one's spirituality, Soul Body, and Astral Projection. Non-Beyonders were unable to obtain precise or clear revelations. Card divination provided fixed symbolism, presenting even an average person's faint revelation. Dreams were somewhere in between the other forms.

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50: Old Neil's Method of Repayment

Half past seven in the evening, around the Moretti family's dining table.

"Klein, why do you need to be at work so early as a consultant? Would emergency matters at the security company be more dangerous?" Benson forked a potato from a dish of potato-stewed beef as he raised the matter in concern.

Klein carefully spat out the bones from a pan-fried fish and gave his prepared answer.

"A batch of historical documents needed immediate shipping to Backlund. I had to be present to handle the handover and make sure there was nothing missing. As you can guess, the bunch of fist-swinging bastards don't know any Feysac."

Upon hearing his answer, Benson, who had finished chewing his food, could not help but sigh.

"Knowledge is truly important."

Making use of this opportunity, Klein took out the remaining five-pound note and handed it to Benson.

"This is my additional payment I received today. It's time you get some decent clothes too."

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51: The Grounded Ritualistic Magic

Using magic to settle an IOU?

Is he trying to curse his debtor to death or create counterfeit notes?

I might not have a solution to the problem, but I can finish you instead?

…

All sorts of thoughts appeared in Klein's mind as he looked at Old Neil oddly.

He seriously considered the possibility of calling the cops, no—of informing the Nighthawks.

Old Neil cast him a sharp glance and said, with irritation, "I see ignorance, foolishness, and that feeble, shameless disbelief in your eyes. Didn't Dunn tell you the maxim of the Mystery Pryers? *Do as you wish, but do no harm*!"

Though the maxim had originated with the secretive and corrupt Moses Ascetic Order, Beyonders who walked that path had proven its truth through experience. By strictly adhering to it—and maintaining the proper awe and reverence—the risk of losing control could be kept to a minimum. The opposite had likewise been confirmed.

PENSAMENTOS DOS CRIADORES

AtlasStudios

The spells in this chapter are adapted from The Wicca Spellbook.

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52: Spectator

"Stop thinking about the bloody IOU. Let's discuss the ritualistic magic." Old Neil put away the candles, cauldron, silver knife, and other items with a relaxed expression.

Klein really wanted to shrug his shoulders like the Americans in his previous life, but ultimately could not bring himself to do something that ungentlemanly.

He turned his focus toward the ritualistic magic and threw out detailed questions that puzzled him, receiving answers from them. For example, the incantations had a particular format. As long as they were satisfied and the key meaning was expressed in Hermes, the rest could be left to one's creativity. Of course, blasphemy or disrespectful descriptions were absolutely forbidden.

The mysticism class lasted until noon before Old Neil coughed twice.

"We have to return to Zouteland Street."

With that said, he grumbled in an indistinct manner, "To get these bloody materials, I missed my beloved breakfast."

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53: Listener

An ancient three-masted sailboat was navigating through a tumultuous storm in the sea.

It was not fast and its displacement was lacking. With the weather and the sea looking like a cataclysmic scene, the sailboat was like a withered leaf separated from its tree. However, regardless of how the typhoons rampaged or how terrifying the waves were, it continued sailing peacefully without any signs of tilting.

Alger Wilson stood on the empty deck as he looked at the massive waves that resembled mountains. His thoughts were a mystery.

It's going to be Monday again… he muttered silently to himself.

It was the day belonging to Earth Mother, the beginning of a series of waxing and waning.

However, it meant something different to Alger. It belonged to a mysterious existence forever enveloped in grayish-white fog.

At least I haven't been reduced to a madman… He stopped looking around as he gave a self-deprecating chuckle.

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54: The First Divination Requester

Upon seeing Klein's odd expression, Angelica immediately felt her beliefs waver.

"Is that so? Mr. Glacis mentioned that you were able to tell of an ailment in his lungs simply from observation…"

Her voice softened until she finally shut up.

Observation? A dark glabella? Klein was instantly enlightened as he shook his head with a chortle.

"I believe Mr. Glacis was mistaken."

He was planning on being perfunctory, but after recalling that no one sought his divination services the entire afternoon yesterday, his mind whirled. It affected his goal of acting as a Seer, so he explained, "It's actually a form of divination."

"Divination? But Mr. Glacis only mentioned that you observed his face. That's also considered divination?" asked Angelica in shock and doubt.

Klein smiled, composed.

"As a member of the Divination Club, you should know about palm-reading, right?"

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55: Revelation

Anna, with her beautiful eyes, hesitated for more than ten seconds.

"You can choose any type that you believe will be accurate. You are the fortune-teller, while I'm not. Of course, apart from cards, including tarot, I have also attempted studying them at home. I always felt they were more like toys or a game."

Klein thought for a moment, his wrists leaning on the edge of the table. He steepled his hands before his face, his gaze peaceful. He said softly, "Then we shall use the astrolabe."

He pointed to a fountain pen and stack of white paper on the table and said, "Write down the name of your fiancé as well as his facial features, address, and date of birth. It would be even better if you can remember the specific time he was born."

From her clothes, makeup, and demeanor, Klein did not believe that she was illiterate.

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56: Escape from the Sea

In a rather spacious living room, Anna and Joyce were seated on different sofas, separated by Anna's parents.

Joyce sighed with a satisfied expression and said, "By Steam, I am so lucky to come back alive, to be able to see Anna again."

"My poor Joyce, what happened?" Anna couldn't help but ask with concern.

Joyce took a glance at his fiancée, and his expression turned grave.

"I still feel terrified to this day. I keep waking up from my dreams again and again. Five days after the Alfalfa left Caesar Pier, we came across pirates, scary pirates. The only fortunate thing was that their leader's name was Nast."

"The pirate that calls himself the King of the Five Seas?" Anna's father, Mr. Wayne, asked in shock.

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57: Organization and Summary

After pausing for a moment, Klein continued writing.

"The key to resolving problems with potions lies in digestion, not mere control. This is fairly straightforward to understand.

"Simply controlling a potion is like treating its power as an external tool. A tamed beast, no matter how obedient, never truly becomes part of you. The risk of it turning against you always remains. Digestion, on the other hand, is about making the potion a part of yourself. You break it down, fuse with it, absorb it, and integrate it into a unified system.

"I am confident of this point. What matters even more is how 'acting' facilitates digestion.

"From my experience as a Seer today, I can propose two hypotheses, which can be tested in the future.

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58: A Train of Thought

The next day, a Monday morning.

Klein, who had the day off, didn't leave home. Instead, he gave Melissa his letter directed to Mentor Cohen Quentin and more than enough money to buy stamps. He entrusted her with the job of mailing the letter at the post office near the Tingen Technical School where she studied.

After breakfast, he slept in to make up for the lack of sleep caused by the previous night's "work." He only woke up because of his stomach's grumblings close to noon.

He heated up some leftovers from the night before and ate them with a loaf of rye bread. Klein grabbed a newspaper and entered the bathroom on the second floor.

Whenever he did that, he couldn't help but sigh at the lack of a cell phone.

After about seven or eight minutes, he left the toilet refreshed and washed his hands. He then returned to his bedroom and locked his door.

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59: Roselle's Origins

Upon hearing The Fool's question, Audrey did not immediately answer like in the past. Instead, she widened her crystalline eyes and glanced at The Hanged Man with a scrutinous attitude.

Alger subconsciously subdued his body motions. After a few seconds of silence, he said, "I found two pages of the Emperor Roselle's diary and have memorized their contents."

"I have one page," Audrey, whose vision was obscured by the fog, said as though she was removed from the conversation.

"Pretty good." Klein did not allow his joy or his disappointment be noticed from his voice.

He felt joy as there were three full pages, but disappointment also because there were only three pages. Their initial search for the diary was definitely easier, for all they had to do was ask through their connections and channels they were already familiar with. Collecting the pages would become more and more difficult as time went on as it would involve more and more elements.

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60: Second Blasphemy Slate

"No problem." Klein tried to maintain his unchanging deep tone.

He rested his left elbow on the armrest of his chair and supported his forehead slightly with his fingers, posing as though he was listening calmly.

Alger deliberated over his words and said, "The Antigonus is an ancient family. Their history can be traced back to the Cataclysm Epoch before the Fourth Epoch and is related to the second Blasphemy Slate."

The second Blasphemy Slate? There's a second Blasphemy Slate? How many are there? Klein's pupils shrank, and he nearly changed his posture.

According to what The Hanged Man and Justice have said previously, the Blasphemy Slate contained the profound mysteries of the twenty-two paths of the divine!

There are two of such important items, or even more?

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61: Strange Symbol

"The Fool that doesn't belong to this era… the mysterious ruler above the gray fog… King of Yellow and Black who wields good luck…" Audrey Hall recited the three descriptions to herself silently. She suddenly felt a tumultuous wave of emotion go through her, preventing her from maintaining her Spectator state.

As an enthusiast of mysticism, she had learned Hermes that was used in rituals and had tested out the rituals that fellow noble enthusiasts mentioned in private gatherings before she was pulled into the gray fog or made formal contact with Beyonder powers.

None of those rituals had any effects, but they had given Audrey a basic understanding of the structure of incantations.

Thus, she knew clearly what these three incantations described and signified.

The descriptions usually described one of the seven gods that looked over this world!

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62: The Seer's Suggestion

Before Klein left home, he took the time to meticulously clean up his suit and top hat with a small brush and a handkerchief. Then, he washed his white shirt, changing into a similar linen shirt along with the only decent cheap coat he had. He then briskly walked out onto the street.

First, Melissa's dress. Then, Benson's suit. Only then can I consider a second suit for myself. Money is never enough… Besides, we need to save money to buy porcelain tableware to receive our guests… Plus, I have to save money to buy a variety of materials related to mysticism… Klein sat on the public carriage and took note of the financial status at home. The more he did the math, the more he shook his head.

He figured it would take at least a year before he, his brother, and his sister could live like a middle-class family.

Of course, that was without taking promotions and pay rises into consideration.

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63: Dream Interpretation

Klein proceeded a few steps forward and saw the client. He was dressed in a formal black suit and a halved top hat. He held a gold-inlaid wooden cane and his short blond hair flared from the sides. His nose was aquiline like a hawk's beak.

Anna's fiancé… The Joyce Meyer that went through a terrifying ordeal. Klein, who had seen him in his dream divination, immediately greeted with a smile, "Good afternoon, Mr. Meyer."

"Good afternoon, Mr. Moretti." Joyce took off his hat and bowed in greeting. "Thank you for the advice you gave Anna. She cannot stop praising how miraculous you are."

Klein chortled and said, "I did not change a thing. You should be thanking yourself. Without your determination and your hope for a better tomorrow, you wouldn't have been able to overcome such an ordeal."

After the exchange of pleasantries, Klein could not help but lampoon inwardly.

Does this count as mutual professional bootlicking?

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64: Instigator

After giving instructions to her golden retriever, Susie, Audrey paced back and forth, worry flickering in her eyes. She couldn't be certain whether the ritualistic magic would trigger anything unusual.

"Let's do this…" She steadied her breathing, forcing her thoughts into calm, and replayed the imagined process from the detached perspective of an observer. Soon, she settled on a new arrangement.

Audrey unlocked her bedroom door and said softly to Susie, "Stay here. If Annie or the others try to force their way in, run to the bathroom immediately and tell me."

Her personal maidservant carried the spare key to her door out of precaution.

Susie gazed at her knowingly and wagged her tail three times.

"Very good. I'll let you pick whatever you want for lunch today!" Audrey said with a gentle fist pump.

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65: Beyonder Information

With a document signed by Dunn, Klein went underground and turned into the armory.

"Dunn is right. It's time you understand the different Beyonders and the various secret organizations." Dressed in a black classic robe, Old Neil read the note without finding it surprising. Instead, he supported the captain's decision.

He then added immediately with a smile, "After all, you will be heading to the underground market with me tomorrow night."

"Tomorrow night?" Klein did not conceal his pleasant surprise as he asked to confirm.

Old Neil nodded and said with a sigh, "I'm a person who can't sleep when in debt. I always wish to settle them as soon as I can."

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66: Demoness Sect

"Sequence 8: Instigator. They are adept at triggering the evil desires deep in people's hearts, causing contradictions and inciting conflict, thus resulting in bloody massacres…"

The description isn't detailed enough. From the looks of it, the Nighthawks do not understand the capabilities of this potion well enough… But it does match the characteristics of the Alfalfa tragedy… Klein cast his gaze up and read the corresponding Sequence 9 for Instigator.

"Sequence 9: Assassin. Can transform their bodies in a short period of time and become light as a feather. They can also utilize vision equal to that of an eagle. Every Assassin is adept at hiding in the shadows. They have dexterous steps and have the ability to release all their strength in one blow…"

After reading the description, Klein was left completely confused.

Assassin… The advancement from Assassin is Instigator?

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67: Response

The crimson moon high in the sky hung silently in the darkness. It illuminated Tingen City, the city of universities, as it gradually fell silent.

Klein stood in front of his desk and looked through his oriel windows to see the empty Daffodil Street. He heard the sound of carriages quickly galloping far away without causing a din.

He lifted his vine-leaf–patterned silver pocket watch and snapped it open. After a quick glance, he drew the curtains, letting the yellow glow of the gas lamp reflect softly across the bedroom.

Klein turned briskly, locked the door, and shut off the gas valve.

Darkness enveloped the room immediately. Only a thin sliver of red moonlight seeped through the curtains, casting an atmosphere perfectly suited for late-night folk tales.

Klein took out the silver knife he had applied for. He imagined the spherical light and entered a half-Cogitation state.

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68: Monster

At dusk, the setting sun cast long shadows of the carriages and horses.

Having informed Benson and Melissa that he was having dinner at the Blackthorn Security Company, Klein headed to the harbor with Old Neil on a public carriage.

He was dressed in cheap formal attire, afraid that conflict might break out in such a complicated location—if he damaged his tuxedo which he took painstaking care of, he would probably cry his heart out.

When the sunlight appeared to turn fiery, the carriage stopped. Old Neil, in his usual classic black robe and felt black hat with a rounded edge, ignored the gazes of others and walked diagonally to the Evil Dragon Bar ahead of them.

Even though the bar was slightly far away and the heavy doors were tightly shut, Klein still heard wave after wave of rapturous shouts. They appeared to be cheering on a hero.

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69: Protection Amulet

Klein looked over and saw the person inquiring about the cow teeth paeonol.

The man was less than a meter away from him. He was wearing a black suit and a half top hat of the same color. He had a cane adorned with silver in his hand and a pair of gold-framed spectacles on his face. He had a refined bearing.

"Yes, do you need it? This can costs three soli." The owner of the stall was wearing a long black robe, one filled with mysticism traits.

The inquirer whose sideburns were pale yellow thought for a moment before saying, "Can it be cheaper? I still need to buy other ingredients too. For example, this bottle of white-edged sunflower petals."

The stall owner considered for a few seconds before grudgingly replying, "Two soli and six pence. I don't think you can find a price cheaper than that."

Klein immediately felt that he was overthinking things after seeing how the bespectacled man was buying ingredients other than the cow teeth paeonol.

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70: 2-049's Arrival

Clip-clop, clip-clop.

The horses widened their paces as the wheels began rolling in tow. Despite activating his Spirit Vision and turning around, hoping to observe the refined and sweet lady, Klein did not have his wishes fulfilled. All his eyes reflected were brown figures moving past him.

Meanwhile, the passengers from the stop had already boarded the carriage. The carriage door was closed tightly as it gradually departed.

Within the carriage, twenty to thirty people stood closely to each other, their energy fields overlapping and shielding each other. Hence, it was an explosion of colors in Klein's vision, making it difficult for him to differentiate.

He shook his head quietly and raised his finger to tap his glabella to deactivate his Spirit Vision.

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71: Sluggish Phenomenon

Klein repeatedly bent and extended his arm as he watched Dunn push open the Keeper's room with his body sideways.

The captain's carefulness and high alertness, as well as the ridiculous and laughable "protective actions," left him feeling abnormally tensed. The feeling was identical to what he felt when taking tests of courage that required him to walk through spooky cemeteries at night in his youth.

A Grade 2 Sealed Artifact. Dangerous. To be used with care and moderation… It is something even a formal Nighthawk member does not know the details to… It is unknown how dangerous it is… Amid his tense nerves, Klein found it impossible to curb himself from overthinking.

At that moment, his brain suddenly turned numb as though a power switch had been flicked off.

Everything in Klein's vision turned slow. Even his arm actions shared the same fate.

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72: Tracking

The wooden puppet's face was painted in red and yellow like the common clown. The corners of its mouth were upturned high, revealing an abnormally comical smile.

Its lips parted to reveal a dark and deep mouth. Klein, who had locked his gaze with it, felt his hair stand as intense horror leaped out of his heart in an uncontrollable manner.

Everything before his eyes grew dull, as though he was looking at the world through a piece of thick brown glass.

Klein's thoughts slowed down gradually, and he instinctively wanted to ask for help, but his neck seemed to be held tight by a rope. He couldn't make a single sound, and the single word was trapped in silence.

Just then, Dunn noticed his arm exercises becoming sluggish and pushed him heavily.

The brown glass before Klein's eyes shattered in an instant. He blurted out the word "help" which had remained dormant in his throat. It reverberated within the carriage, with sharp panic.

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73: First Battle

Under the illumination of the afternoon sun, Klein in his dust-coated clothes quickly twisted his revolver's barrel to remove his self-imposed safety. He went into a shooting stance, allowing the light to reflect from the brass body of the revolver.

He held the revolver with one hand, and moved his other arm, cautiously paying attention to anything that could happen around him.

At the same time, he was a little worried for Captain Dunn and Mr. Aiur Harson. After all, both were Nightmare Beyonders who specialized in influencing the enemy from the shadows. He did not know if they were adept at direct combat.

Just as Klein was having these considerations, Aiur Harson slowed down, his expression becoming serene and peaceful.

He opened his mouth and recited a peaceful poem, one that seemed to place a person into the night.

"When once the sun sinks in the west,

"And dewdrops pearl the evening's breast;

"Almost as pale as moonbeams are,

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74: Ray Bieber

Haa! Haa! Haa!

Thump! Thump! Thump!

The loud panting and the intense knocking alternated first before they resounded together. It made Klein and company extremely nervous, as though they were hearing some evil murmur.

Taking advantage of the moment Aiur, Dunn and Lorotta had their attention redirected, the suited clown suddenly pulled out a long piece of paper from his pocket.

Pa! He threw it with his right hand as the slip of paper ignited into a black fiery whip. Then, he lashed it towards the side of his ankle.

A fleeting but tragic scream sounded as the suited clown escaped the invisible shackles and did a backflip.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Dunn, Aiur, and Lorotta shot but their bullets only ended up hitting the wooden crates.

The suited clown did not stay any longer as he pressed down on his wound with his right hand while escaping in a direction opposite the warehouse.

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75: Saving himself

Oh no! I've been controlled by the puppet!

Captain and company are either unconscious… or have yet to recover. They can't even get up… They will not be able to… wake me up in time…

No… I have to… save myself!

Everything before Klein's eyes was happening in slow motion. All his joints and his brain seemed to have been coated with an ever-thickening layer of glue.

He had no interest in becoming a human-version puppet, so he seized the opportunity of not being fully controlled by trying his best to seek a way to save himself.

I definitely can't… hit myself… There must be an… external force…

External force… I'll give it a try… There's no time for hesitation…
Without the luxury of time to think through things, Klein came to an idea in less than three seconds. He moved his "rusty" knee joint and took a counterclockwise step.

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76: Dealing With The Aftermath

Bang!

The silver bullet traversed the short distance of a few meters and accurately bore into the suited clown's neck. Large amounts of blood spewed out, dyeing his skin and bow tie red.

The suited clown was unable to let out a cry as his throat seemed to produce sounds of him gasping for breath. He wished to raise his arm to divert the fatal wound, but his joints appeared to be filled with glue. His motions were slow and jerky.

Bang!

Having entered a half-Cogitation state, Klein was not stunned by the appearance of blood. He pulled the trigger once again calmly, as though it was his usual daily practice.

A grisly hole appeared on the suited clown's forehead as crimson red spewed out. The luster in his eyes dimmed as the intricate revolver's might was far higher than what Klein had imagined to be.

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77: Remnant Items

"Alright," answered Leonard with a relaxed expression when he heard Dunn's suggestion.

Following that, everyone walked out of the warehouse and came close to where Monster Bieber had "self-destructed." With him at the origin, they began searching outwards radially.

"Captain, what are we looking for?" Klein looked at the rotting flesh and blood that was strewn everywhere. He held back his urge to retch as he looked at Dunn Smith beside him ponderingly.

Dunn did not look up. Instead, he used his deep gray eyes to sweep the ground.

"Awakening ahead of time, losing control, and becoming a monster. This means that Ray Bieber did not fully absorb the Beyonder powers provided by the notebook. It also means that a part of his body is considered extraordinary, making it prime material."

"If you ever encounter something similar, make sure not to miss out on doing a search. It might be a relatively important item."

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78: Trauma

Aiur Harson added, "Exactly, it is hard to imagine that the subsequent Sequence of Seer would be Clown. According to normal logic, no one would link them together."

"Is that strange? I remember that quite a number of Sequence potions also seem to lack similarities between their different levels." Lorotta covered her mouth as she yawned. It was obvious that her injuries were more severe. Not even Goddess's Gaze could help her to maintain her vibrant energy.

"No, Lorotta. This is completely different. Even if the other Sequence potions are lacking a connection, we can also find common points if viewed from a different angle. However, I cannot comprehend it for Seer and Clown at all," said Aiur Harson as he shook his head and sighed.

Klein listened to their discussion and laughed.

"No, there's still a common point."

"What?" Aiur asked curiously. Even Dunn's arm exercises clearly slowed down.

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79: Another Murmuring

Klein instantly felt his hair stand on end as the icy hand tightened around his wrist. He instinctively pulled his wrist back in a desperate attempt to escape.

A heavy sensation bore down on him as Klein used every fiber of strength in his entire body to yank his arm back.

Bam!

The pale, naked corpse was yanked so forcefully to the side that it fell from the autopsy table.

However, the white, ice-cold fingers' grip remained firmly latched onto Klein's wrist.

Klein momentarily lost the ability to think; the only thought that went through his mind was to draw his revolver and riddle the corpse in holes.

However, as he could not retract his dominant hand, he threw his black cane and desperately tried to retrieve his revolver from his holster to no avail.

At that moment, the corpse's eyes rose, revealing a pair of calm, blue eyes.

His mouth moved as he muttered, "Hornacis… Hornacis… Hornacis…"

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80: Banquet Invitation

After having dinner, a satiated Klein casually lounged on the living room sofa. He used a small letter opener to open the letter he received from his mentor.

Melissa was sitting by the dining table at the time, working hard on a textbook problem, with the gas lamp for illumination. Benson was cradled in a single seater, reading Accountancy for Beginners.

Klein found three pages in the letter that he read with both fear and anticipation.

"…very happy to receive your letter. It reminds me of the good old days over the past few years. Unfortunately, Welch and Naya have left us forever…"

"I attended their burials separately and could feel their parents' anguish. The two of them were young adults who were supposed to have beautiful, bright futures ahead of them…"

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81: Finally Meeting

"I have to complete a mission independently in order to become an official member?" Klein was taken aback. "But we might not even have a mission this week, and it might not be so simple."

Wouldn't this mean that it'll take me one to two months to become an official Nighthawk? Only then will I get a pay rise…

Old Neil sniffed at the coffee and shot a glance at him.

"It's only a ritual among Nighthawks. After all, we stand at the peak of Beyonder danger and don't want our teammates to act like children who require constant care. This won't affect the salary that you'll receive as an official member, or your privileges needed to fulfill your duty."

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82: Herb Store

Various colors surfaced as auras and entered Klein's eyes. He casually studied Sir Deweyville's condition.

He's very healthy; there are almost no hidden problems… His emotional state is horrendous. Amid the dullness, there's frailty… His mental state is frail? He has trouble sleeping well? But the purple aura at his head is completely fine… Klein muttered silently to himself as Sir Deweyville walked off and left the library.

Retracting his gaze, Klein pinched his forehead and sighed inwardly.

Being a tycoon sure isn't easy…

He didn't pay much attention to the matter and returned his gaze onto the journal issues in front of him.

Klein didn't find a lot of clues after reading each of them. He could only confirm a few things.

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83: Carving

Holding onto the yellowish-brown paper bag full of herbs, Bogda staggered out of the Lawson's Folk Herb Store.

While waiting for a tracked carriage, he suddenly came to a realization.

He had spent ten pounds to buy a bag of stuff?

This was nearly a month's salary for him!

If it wasn't for his trust in Anna and Joyce, he wouldn't have brought that much cash to the Divination Club!

Could it be that the reason why Mr. Moretti only accepted eight pence for his divination, had something to do with his collusion with the boss of Lawson's Folk Herb Store, so as to earn more? This was a classic scam written on the papers! When Bogda made this connection, he even began to suspect Klein a little. He even began suspecting Joyce and Anna.

When a tracked carriage stopped in front of him, he looked at the herbs in his hand. Unable to bring himself to return, he entered the carriage with a heavy heart.

…

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84: Elizabeth

Seeing the unconvinced look his sister's face, Klein suddenly felt like it was a good opportunity. He sized her up and said with a solemn expression, "Melissa, I think you aren't showing enough respect to today's banquet as well."

"What?" Melissa wore a puzzled look.

Klein pointed at her neck.

"As a lady, you are lacking a necklace that accentuates that area."

Without waiting for his sister to say another word, he smiled as he fished out a silver amulet wrapped with angel wings from his pocket.

"Thankfully, I prepared one for you."

"…" Melissa was taken aback at first before she asked, "How much was it?"

Sis, your concerns are really quite misplaced… Klein silently scoffed as he explained with a chuckle, "It's actually not very expensive. Since it was in an incomplete state, I imitated an item that I've seen before and engraved blessing incantations and beautiful patterns on them."

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85: Urgency

The strange, twisted, and obscure fluctuation was short-lived. Shortly afterwards, Klein even suspected that he was hallucinating.

If he wasn't considered rather skilled at spiritual perception, it was very likely that he would've written off the abnormality.

Klein frowned as he thought of his sister upstairs. He tightly held onto his cane as he went around the bathroom and hobbled to the Wood household's staircase.

He quickly went upstairs while following the traces with his spiritual perception before arriving at the living room beside the balcony.

This should be it… Klein mumbled as he raised his hand and tapped twice on his glabella.

Auras penetrated the walls and the large wooden door before entering his vision. Most of the colors were ordinary with a blurry outline.

However, one of them in particular was rippling with a sinister dark green color over its surface that slowly corroded inwards.

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86: Prayer

Suspension-style ritualistic magic referred to the termination of a ritual according to the Beyonder's judgment. They could finish other matters first before returning to continue the ritual. Even by doing so, it was still possible to gain the desired effects.

This was a technique produced over 1000 years of ritualistic magic development. After all, many high-level ritualistic magic required multiple steps. The duration ranged from an hour to half a day before finishing. It was difficult to ensure that no one disturbed them during the entire process or that there wouldn't be any accidents.

After gaining lessons from various predecessors through blood and tears, gaining feedback through each failure, being able to suspend ritualistic magic became mainstream at the higher levels while it also indirectly affected the lower level rituals.

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87: Exhortation

"Has it really been resolved?" Elizabeth asked in disbelief.

Klein smiled and nodded casually.

"Yes."

"It wasn't too hard."

That last part was a lie… He added inwardly.

Perhaps it was the fact that Klein had been calm and collected all this time, or perhaps he was her only ray of hope. Either way, Elizabeth didn't doubt him any more. She patted her chest and heaved a sigh of relief.

"Thank you. You truly are a trustworthy gentleman. I was scared senseless just now.

"How is Selena? Is she fine now?"

"She might remain unconscious for the next few minutes, but she's completely fine now. Oh, two to three days of weakness is to be expected." Klein suddenly had a stern expression on his face as he asked, "Who taught her mysticism? Didn't he tell her about the basic taboos?"

Elizabeth straightened up a little more like a student who had just been scolded by her teacher.

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88: Report

"What is it?" Benson asked casually.

Melissa looked at her brother with a serious expression because she felt that Klein's behavior tonight was strange as well. In fact, it only looked slightly more normal than Elizabeth's behavior and, later, Selena's.

Klein chuckled as he had long thought of an excuse and said, "There was a mistake in one of the document descriptions, and I already informed my colleagues that I would hand it over to them when I arrive early at the company tomorrow morning. So, I can either amend it now since it's on the way or wake up at least half an hour earlier tomorrow morning. No doubt, I've chosen to do the former."

"Ah, no wonder. I had a nagging feeling that your mind wasn't in the game, so you were actually thinking about work." Benson smiled, suddenly enlightened. "No, I apologize. I should say, the card game helped you think."

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89: A Simple Mission

Klein nodded and said, "Alright, but I still don't know what my mission is."

"Nothing dangerous. I haven't seen any signs of danger at the very least," Dunn emphasized. "This is a case which was referred to us by Golden Indus's police department. The famous philanthropist Sir Deweyville has been experiencing unusual harassment over the past month. Be it his bodyguards, the security guards he has employed, or the police, none of them have been able to find the culprit. Inspector Tolle, who is in charge of this case, suspects that it involves Beyonder powers and, thus, handed the case over to us."

I saw Sir Deweyville at the library the other day and noticed that he was feeling down and lethargic. So it was a result of being harassed… Klein knitted his brows and asked, "What kind of harassment is it?"

There hasn't been any physical harm inflicted yet; thus, the harassment wouldn't be considered dangerous.

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90: Findings By Sight

Sir Deweyville's bedroom was larger than the living room and dining room of Klein's house combined. It was partitioned into a place for a bed, a living space, a changing room, a bathroom, and a study desk and bookshelves. The furnishings were exquisite, and the details were extravagant.

But to Klein, the light seemed dimmer and the temperature was several degrees colder than the outside.

At the same time, he seemed to hear the sound of sobbing and moaning, as though one was putting up a last-ditch struggle.

Klein was in a trance, and everything suddenly returned to normal. The sunlight shone brightly through the window and poured over the entire bedroom. The temperature was reasonable, neither too high nor low. The surrounding policemen, bodyguards, and butler were quiet. No one spoke.

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91: Solution

The scenery started to distort, turning illusory and began to fade away.

After Klein left his dreamlike state, his vision adapted to the darkness in the room.

He knew that with one pound and ten soli, which was thirty soli a week, Benson didn't have an easy time supporting the family according to the standards of an average family.

He had thought that the majority of workers earned twenty soli a week.

He had once heard Melissa remark that Lower Street of Iron Cross Street had five, seven, or even ten families squeezing into the same room.

He also learned from Benson that as a result of the situation in the Southern Continent, the kingdom's economy was in a recession for the past few months.

He knew that a maid, with board and lodging provided, could earn between three soli and sixpence to six soli a week.

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92: Psychological Expert

"Mass hysteria?" Sir Deweyville, who had met many psychiatrists recently, ruminated over the term Klein had said.

Despite their curiosity, his butler, bodyguards, and servants didn't make a single sound since they had not been given permission by him.

As for Sergeant Gate, he looked towards Klein doubtfully as if he had never heard of that concept.

Klein controlled his habit of tapping the armrest with his fingertips and calmly explained, "Humans can be fooled easily by their sensory organs. Mass hysteria is a kind of psychogenic illness that is a result of tense nerves and other factors amongst a group of individuals as they influence each other."

The jargon he spewed out confused Sir Deweyville, Sergeant Gate, and the rest, causing them to subconsciously opt to believe him.

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93: New Diary Page

Above the gray fog, gigantic stone columns held up a majestic divine hall.

Two dark red blobs extended out into faint human figures by the side of the ancient mottled bronze table.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Fool." Augmented with a blurry effect, Audrey greeted him with a bow and smiled. "It is unfortunate that there is no wine here; otherwise, we could have a toast to your successful trial."

She was referring to the ritualistic magic.

"You are more powerful than we imagined," Alger Wilson praised as well.

Klein was surrounded by the thick fog as usual. He pressed down with his right arm and spoke with his normal tone, replying as though it was natural.

"Great, this means that we are on the path of excellence. If you have any matters to tend to that leave you unable to attend the gathering on Mondays, conduct the ritual and inform me. All you have to do is change the line in the incantation 'I pray for a good dream' with the reason."

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94: Hidden Sage

"The Fallen Creator… Fallen…" Alger ruminated over The Fool's words and fell deep in thought.

However, what struck Alger the most was The Fool's relaxed, natural, and nonchalant attitude.

He acted as if they were equal!

If he hadn't experienced their previous ritual, Alger might have thought The Fool was merely bluffing, and building himself up to intimidate him and Justice. But now, he was of the opinion that even if The Fool was inferior to the True Creator, he was at least close to that level.

It's dangerous. It's also an opportunity… Alger muttered softly. He then spoke with a smile, "Mr. Fool, your description is indeed more appropriate. According to our observations, Beyonders who believed in the True Creator, no—the Fallen Creator, have a higher probability of losing control. The rest of them are mostly psychopaths."

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95: The Supplicant

"A prayer?"

Klein's mind stirred as he used the same method he used back when he spied on The Hanged Man. He allowed his spirituality to spread outward and touch the crimson blob.

A hazy and contorted image appeared within his sight. He could faintly see a blond teen kneeling on the ground, facing a pure crystal ball.

That teenager was dressed in a tight-fitting black outfit, with a style very different from the contemporary styles of the Loen Kingdom. It was more congruent with the traditional clothing of the Feysac Empire and the Intis Republic that Klein had seen from reading magazines.

The area surrounding the teenager was dark and had old furniture. From time to time, the room would be illuminated, but Klein couldn't hear the roaring thunder or the pattering of rain.

In the image, the teenager had his hands on his forehead, fingers crossed. He bowed forward, continually praying for something. His thick accent buzzed in Klein's ears.

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96: Daly's Guess

By the afternoon of the next day, Klein had fully recovered from any signs of exhaustion. He walked into the Blackthorn Security Company with steady footsteps.

"Good morning, Klein. The weather is so cool and beautiful today, I'm looking forward to tonight's feast." Rozanne who was wearing a light green dress greeted him with a smile from behind the reception desk.

Klein deliberately touched his stomach and said, "Miss Rozanne, you shouldn't be talking about that so early in the morning! I'm already sick of today's mission that has yet to arrive. I only hope for the evening to arrive sooner."

"Me too." Rozanne chuckled.

She looked to the left and right, then she beckoned for Klein to come closer. She lowered her voice and said, "I met Madam Daly earlier."

"Spirit Medium Madam Daly?" Klein asked in surprise.

The most famous Spirit Medium from Awwa County had been living at Enmat Harbor all this time, and it wasn't a short distance from Tingen.

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97: Combat Teacher

At two in the afternoon, outside of a simple two-storied building that was in disrepair at the outskirts of the North Borough.

Klein, who was in his probationary inspector uniform, looked at the weed-filled garden and the vines that had crept up the walls. He turned his head in surprise.

"My combat instructor lives here?"

Shouldn't a combat artist who was selected by the Nighthawks be exceptional…

Leonard Mitchell, who had guided Klein there, snickered and said, "Don't underestimate Mr. Gawain because of his residence's surroundings. Although he was never conferred an aristocratic title, he was a true knight back in the day."

Having said that, the poetic Nighthawk, who was dressed in a white shirt, black trousers, and buttonless leather boots suddenly felt melancholic.

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98: Mr. Azik

Faced with his sister's question, all Klein could do was reply with a regretful smile, "Sore muscles."

He originally believed that by consuming the Sequence potion, his constitution would be enhanced as a Beyonder, but the harsh reality told him that a Seer's stats points were all allocated to his spirituality, mind, intuition, and interpretation. It didn't aid him in adjusting to combat training quickly.

As for the original Klein, he had focused on his studies early on and had suffered from malnutrition. That led him to possess a below-average physical condition. The fact that he was having 'after effects' from working out was to be expected.

"Sore muscles? I remember you returning after dinner last night and you didn't do anything else… Does alcohol cause sore muscles?" Melissa inquired with an inquisitive look.

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99: Red Chimney

Late in the afternoon, Klein returned home and drew the curtains, allowing his room to slip into darkness.

He took out his pen and paper and thought for a long time, finally writing down a sentence: "The kidnapping of Elliott was due to Beyonder elements."

As a Seer, Klein had tried to divine if those coincidences were a consequence of unnatural developments, but the results showed otherwise.

This time, he was influenced by Azik to look into these events again. He also drew lessons from the suited clown. He seriously designed an appropriate divination statement, eliminating any descriptions that might be vague or cause confusion.

"Yes, I should break down the three coincidences and divine them separately…" Klein nodded in thought as he slowly removed the topaz from his wrist.

He held the spirit pendulum with his left hand and allowed it to hang close over the divination statement on the paper.

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100: Interpreting Symbols

"Clues to the Clown potion."

…

On the seat of honor at the ancient bronze table, Klein repeated the divination statement a few times before leaning back and entering a deep sleep.

His surroundings quickly became peaceful and quiet. He saw a hazy view, with countless distorted and blurry scenes flashing past, just like drops of morning dew on tender flower petals.

Gradually, Klein grasped his spirituality and came to his senses.

He saw a fireplace before him with a rocking chair in front of it. Sitting on it was an old woman dressed in black and white.

Although he couldn't see her face since she was hanging her head low, Klein's gut feeling told him that she was an old lady. And he was pretty certain about it.

The old lady was facing a desk directly. There were newspapers and tin cans inlaid with silver on the desk.

"This is…" Klein found the scene before his eyes very familiar, and he quickly recognized what he saw.

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101: Unexpected Clue

Howes Street, Divination Club.

Klein pressed down on his half top hat and walked along the stairway towards the main door.

He wasn't dressed in his usual formal wear. Today, he was wearing a white shirt and a light-colored vest, paired with a thin black trench coat, making him look more spirited than he had before.

This set of clothing was more suitable for combat and had only cost him one pound, including the fee for the small pocket that he had sewn into the vest. Compared to the suit he had purchased, it was so cheap that it brought tears to his eyes.

He stroked the revolver in his holster, as well as the metal bottles in his tiny inner pocket. Klein then took out the portrait and entered the Divination Club.

Without any surprise, he met the beautiful attendant, Angelica.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Moretti. I thought you would come only a few days later." Angelica was taken aback at first before she immediately revealed a brilliant smile.

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102: Cloth Merchant

The more Klein thought about it, the more likely it seemed. Otherwise, who would have borrowed those random journal issues for no reason?

Yes, research regarding the main peak of the Hornacis mountain range is quite an unpopular field. Other than the corresponding lecturers and associate professors, the common hobbyist would've never heard of it. Even the original Klein, who was a history graduate, only knew about it from the Antigonus family's notebook… Although Tingen is a city of universities, there wouldn't be that many people who would interested in the topic. And even if there is anyone interested, most of them would remain within the university's compounds. There would be no need to borrow the book from the Deweyville Library.

The most important point is that the book happened to be borrowed only recently…

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103: Doing As the Heart Willed

He resides at 19 Howes Street?

Whilst memorizing the information, Klein keenly noticed a piece of information.

Yes, Welch stayed on Howes Street. The Divination Club is on Howes Street. This cloth merchant named Sirius Arapis also lives on Howes Street… From the looks of it, it's nothing strange for Welch to know Hanass Vincent either. They might have even gotten to know each through Sirius Arapis…

Suddenly, Klein felt that he had linked the clues together as his thoughts turned clear.

He was originally confused as to how Welch would be acquainted with Hanass Vincent since this son of a banker wasn't particularly interested in mysticism. To him, money was more important than divinations. But now, Klein felt that he had an inkling as to how they became acquainted.

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104: Mr. Z

One pocket, two pockets, three pockets… Klein soon found a bloodstained wallet, a Deweyville Library card, two pairs of brass keys, an unstuffed smoking pipe, a sheathed dagger, and a few letters that were folded neatly.

Laying everything onto the ground except for the letters, he stood up straight and looked at the wallet. He confirmed that there were only ten plus soli and some copper pennies.

The craftsmanship of the wallet is quite exquisite. It's such a pity… Klein sighed, feeling a little distracted.

If I didn't spend so much of my private stash of money, buying a wallet would've been on my schedule today.

After shaking his head, Klein opened the letters and quickly scanned through them.

"Dear Mr. Z,"

"Please allow me to defend myself. When Hanass and I sold off the Antigonus family's notebook, it wasn't stupidity or betrayal. It didn't appear special in any way when it was in our hands."

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105: Spirit Channeling

Klein twisted open the golden bottle's cap and brought it to his nose. He took a whiff of the stimulating scent that energized him.

This was Holy Night Powder made using Slumber flowers, Dragon Blood grass, deep red sandalwood, mint, and other herbs. Since it was simple to concoct, Klein had made a batch the moment he got the ingredients from the underground market. It was going to be of use now.

He poured a little of the Holy Night Powder on his palm and collected himself. His irises turned dark.

Next, Klein put away the metal bottle and scattered the powder onto the ground after infusing his spirituality into it.

He scattered the powder as he walked, forming a circle around Sirius's corpse.

A formless barrier rose, separating them from the outside world.

Klein flicked away the remaining Holy Night Powder on his hand and took out the other metal bottles. He sprinkled the Amantha extract and other liquids in the surrounding area.

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106: Artist Klein

After eight in the evening, in the Moretti family's dining room.

As he looked at the shallow soup left in the bowl, Benson raised his hand to cover his mouth to give a satisfied burp.

"Although that was our third time eating it, I still find it delicious. The sourness and sweetness of the tomato and the chewy texture of the oxtail blends into a perfect and unique flavor. Klein, I'm sorry that the Blackthorn Security Company caused Tingen City to lose such an outstanding chef."

Melissa leaned backwards in her chair and nodded in agreement silently.

"This is because you have yet to try real cooking." Klein smiled humbly. "If we have a chance in the future, let's head to Bonaparte Restaurant on Howes Street for some authentic Intis cuisine, and also to Coastline Restaurant in the Golden Indus borough for some southern delicacies."

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107: Fors

"Author?" Audrey asked casually as she observed Glaint's reaction.

Subsequently, she didn't have to mind the presence of her maidservant, Annie, since they chatted about ordinary topics.

Glaint straightened his body and chuckled.

"Yes, I believe that you have read her works in the past. She wrote the book, Stormwind Mountain Villa, which was highly acclaimed for the past two months."

"I enjoyed that book, especially the calm Lady Sissi," Audrey replied with a faint smile.

Meanwhile, she was rolling her eyes at her own hypocrisy inwardly.

That was because her latest hobby had nothing to do with novels. She had stopped reading Stormwind Mountain Villa a month ago, her progress stopped at the one-third mark.

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108: Deep Into The Night

Despite not being dawn yet, the well-ventilated but quiet and dark underground was illuminated by gas lamps. The dim yellow light emitted from the gas lamps were protected by glass, allowing them to steadily shine throughout the empty and quiet tunnel.

Klein sat in the duty room and casually flipped through the newspapers, magazines, and books piled before him. He directed some of his attention outside, to prevent anyone from charging inside the Chanis Gate.

His trench coat and top hat were hung on the clothes rack near the entrance while his cane was leaning against the wall where it could be easily retrieved.

The rich aroma of coffee filled the air, and Klein couldn't help but take a whiff. He massaged his temples to fight against the heavy head feeling he was experiencing and the weariness of his body.

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109: Deduction

The sound of running footsteps entered Klein's ears, calming him down as he stood at the entrance of the guard room.

Leonard arrived first, holding a revolver. He asked in a solemn voice, "What happened?"

Watching Leonard struggle to stop, Klein suddenly thought of something that Rozanne had mentioned in the past. Three years ago, Leonard, who had just become a Sleepless, tried to run down the flight of stairs despite not having adapted to the potion's power, causing him to fall and roll down.

With a cough, Klein pointed at Chanis Gate and said, "There was a knocking noise from the inside, which then became a loud slamming noise. Then the door was pushed open a little."

"Chanis Gate was pushed open?" the short Kenley asked in shock.

"Yes, a slit was opened." Klein continued his description. He saw that Leonard, Kenley, and Royale had stopped approaching the guard room, instead forming an arc formation a few steps away, loosely surrounding Klein.

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110: Confirmation

After thinking for a while, Klein decided to return home to confirm something.

He believed that if the Misfortune Cloth Puppet hadn't intentionally shown him the picture on the paper, then the Captain and the rest would definitely find traces in their follow-up investigations. It wouldn't matter much if he reported it or not.

If it were the converse, it was something worth careful consideration.

That was also what Klein wanted to confirm.

He took the trackless public carriage to Daffodil Street. When he returned home, his brother Benson and his sister Melissa had yet to wake up, since it was Sunday. The living room was dark and quiet.

Klein boiled a kettle of water, threw in some tea leaves, and drank it with wheat bread. Then he took his coat, hat, and cane towards the stairs.

He subconsciously lightened his footsteps to avoid making any loud noises.

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111: Letting Slip

Sometime later, the lecturer, who had relatively high cheekbones, walked up the wooden podium. She cleared her throat and said, "Good morning, kind, charitable ladies. I am Xaviera Hedda. What I am about to share with you today are my experiences in managing family expenses. There are three parts, the first being how a family with an annual income of a hundred pounds should balance food, housing, clothing, and employing helpers. The second would be where a family earning two hundred pounds yearly should be increasing their expenditure to appear more decent…"

Melissa listened attentively. She had her brothers' annual income at her fingertips.

It's already over two hundred pounds… she thought, half in relief and half in fear.

She was relieved and satisfied with her current life, but was also afraid that this way of life would vanish in the blink of an eye.

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112: Azik's Explanation

Backlund, Empress Borough.

Audrey Hall sat on a suspended chair in a windy corner and looked at the flowers that were blooming under the sun. She thought of Fors Wall's request.

According to Viscount Glaint, there really was a young girl named Xio Derecha being impounded at a temporary prison located in Backlund's North Borough.

She was charged with grievous assault against a decent gentleman due to a financial conflict. She caused the man to be bedridden, and he might not be able to stand on his feet ever again.

Regarding that, Fors's explanation was that the gentleman wasn't a nice person but the head of a gang in Backlund's East Borough. He made a living by being an usury.

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113: Request

Mr. Azik can tell that I'm a Beyonder? His ability is truly powerful… Klein froze for a moment before he gave an honest reply.

"Yes."

He thought for a while before adding, "Because of what happened to Welch and Naya."

"It's as I thought…" Azik sighed. "There were two people with extraordinary powers amongst the group of police that came to question me and Cohen."

It was probably Captain and Leonard. They were in charge of Welch's case… Klein nodded slightly, not interrupting Azik.

Azik raised his cane and said, "You should have entered their circle. I hope that you can help me search for clues of my origin. You do not need to go out of your way to do it, just note it down if you find any clues."

Upon saying that, Azik wore a bitter smile.

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114: The Standards of a Member

No crude oil? It couldn't be found for some reason, or there really wasn't any available?

From the period Emperor Roselle was assassinated till this day, about a hundred and fifty years have passed, and there are still no traces of crude oil…

Klein's pupils constricted as his hand quivered while holding the diary.

No crude oil not only meant that the future of the internal combustion engine became uncertain, it would also lead to a state of stagnation in the chemical industry. In other words, Earth's modern industrial age would never transpire here!

In short, the development of this world was uncertain to Klein.

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115: Cheat

"You must not speak my name without my permission."

…

Several minutes after the Gathering ended, Audrey and Alger, who had returned to their bedroom and ship respectively, could still hear the words of The Fool reverberating in their ears.

Their impression of the mysterious and powerful Mr. Fool was normally relaxed, calm, and unfathomable. It was rare that he would adopt such a stern, supercilious attitude.

Because of that, they were exceptionally alarmed. They submitted to his wishes sincerely.

They were no strangers to words like that, but these instructions were normally recorded within The Revelation of Evernight or The Book of Storms!

…

In the West Borough of Tingen City, on Daffodil Street.

Klein pulled open the curtains and allowed the golden sunlight to pour into his bedroom.

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116: Lanevus's Child

Christina didn't notice the seer's blank look. She took a peek at Angelica over at the reception desk, lowered her voice, and said, "I mean Lanevus's child."

She extended her hand to point at the young lady with the sunhat and said, "This is my niece, Megose. Her mother is my elder sister. I'm very sorry and regretful that I thought Lanevus was an outstanding young man back then, and I introduced Megose to Lanevus, who was single. Then they became lovers.

"Megose's parents were happy with Lanevus at first too. They planned to pour all their savings into the steel company after they got engaged. Luckily, before that happened, Lanevus ran away. Their family didn't encounter any life-threatening losses. Unfortunately, my sister and brother-in-law have to explain to their relatives and friends why the engagement ceremony will be canceled, and they have to worry about the child that Megose is bearing.

PENSAMENTOS DOS CRIADORES

AtlasStudios

Regarding this chapter, the author explains two chapters down with a footnote without giving any spoilers. If he wanted to force Klein not to activate his Spirit Vision to miss the observation, he would have used a milder method which would not seem that jarring, such as activating his Spirit Vision, only to not discover anything. Or, it was some small psychological problem. There would be sufficient reasons for future explanations. Then, why did the author emphasize that Klein had forgotten to activate his Spirit Vision? Have some confidence in the author.

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117: Contact

Daxter Guderian, a doctor of the Greenhill Mental Asylum…

Klein silently repeated what the detective had said and started to think about the ways he could interact with this doctor whom he suspected to be a Spectator from the Psychology Alchemists.

He didn't want to take too much of a risk on this matter. He didn't want the Nighthawks to discover that he was problematic. He didn't want to lose the life he had now over a mere exchange of information and resources.

Furthermore, this person was most probably a Spectator. Anyone who hadn't undergone special training wouldn't be able to hide their motives and thoughts from a person like that.

I'll get a proxy, making me appear a little more mysterious? No, the more people involved, the easier it is for there to be problems… Yes… perhaps I can hide the truth within the truth. I'll let that doctor know of my thoughts and feelings through my expression and body language, but not the whole truth…

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118: August

Time flew by and Tingen bade farewell to the end of summer. The temperature hovered between twenty-six and twenty-seven degrees Celsius.

Whoosh!

Klein stood up from the bathtub and took a stride forward, sending water droplets to the floor.

He stood there naked, looking down at his abs. He flexed and saw prominent muscle lines appear.

That was the result of his daily training. Besides, he appeared a lot more energetic.

And just today, his combat teacher, Gawain had started teaching him the basic footwork for punching and the techniques for delivering force.

Tap. Tap. Tap. Klein stepped on the floor barefooted in the bathroom, either sliding forward or retreating before dodging to the right and swinging his fist while he made a defensive gesture.

Phew. He stopped and let out a breath happily. He took the towel next to him and wiped himself down.

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119: The True Lower Street

Tingen City, 2 Daffodil Street.

Klein, who had left a note, locked the door and walked briskly towards Leonard Mitchell who was waiting by the side of the road.

Leonard's short black hair had grown a little over the month, and the lack of any grooming made it look messy.

Despite that, his messy hair still complimented his decent looks, emerald-colored eyes, and poetic vibes. It exuded a different sense of beauty.

Indeed, any hairstyle depends on the face… Klein lampooned inwardly. He pointed in the direction of Iron Cross Street and asked, "Is Frye waiting for us there?"

"Yes." Leonard smoothed his untucked shirt and said casually, "Did you notice any clues when you were looking at the documents?"

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120: Workhouse

"There is the presence of supernatural factors…" Klein's eyes returned to normal, and he looked at Leonard and Frye.

Leonard suddenly chuckled.

"Very professional, and deserving of the title of Seer."

Are you trying to hint at something… Klein muttered in his head.

Frye opened his suitcase and took out a silver knife and other tools. He paused and asked, "The corpse tells me that she really died of a sudden heart attack. Do you have any way to divine a more detailed answer?"

Klein nodded seriously and said, "I can attempt to combine a mediumship ritual and a dream divination. Hopefully, I'll be able to obtain something from Mrs. Lauwis's remaining spirituality."

Frye maintained his cold and reserved state. He took two steps back and said, "Give it a try."

He turned his head sideways and looked at Klein. He suddenly sighed without much fluctuation in his tone. "You're getting more and more used to this kind of situation."

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121: Leonard's Hypothesis

After hearing Klein's and Frye's guesses, Leonard tugged on his collar and paced about, saying, "Then we have to investigate everyone in the workhouse who came into contact with Salus, as well as everyone he came across after he went bankrupt and was chased out of the house. It's very troublesome indeed… Time is of the essence. Let's split up and do a cursory check here, then head to the third reported death in the West Borough and leave the rest to the police."

"Alright," Klein answered without hesitation.

Frye didn't have any objections. He turned towards the people who had been sleeping near Salus last night.

Klein was about to find someone to question when he suddenly saw Leonard shooting looks at him. He was motioning at the side hall of the workhouse with his chin.

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122: Target Building

2 Daffodil Street. Inside the living room that was painted with the luster of dusk.

Klein stood in front of the oriel window as he told Frye and Leonard.

"My divination revealed something. I saw a grayish-blue two-story building in my dream. The windows on the first floor were all shut tight, and the curtains were drawn. It's surrounded by a few meters of brown soil without any greenery or flowers. It also has a terribly gloomy garden, just like the kind you find in a horror story.

"The only characteristic that can be used to identify it is a nearby river, a slightly broad river.

"It might be the Tussock River or Khoy River. We could only find out through process of elimination. Hopefully we can still make it in time."

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123: Beyonder Battle

Vines grew all over the dilapidated garden outside the glass windows. The river flowed softly, reflecting the stars in the sky as warm glows suffused out of the nearby buildings.

Everything was silent, as if awaiting the arrival of night.

Trissy, who had ordinary features which combined to make her look surprisingly beautiful, retracted her gaze and walked quickly towards the clothes rack to retrieve a long black robe fitted with a hood.

She quickly put the robe on, fastened the buttons and belt before pulling the hood over her head, transforming herself into an Assassin.

Trissy raised her right hand and swiped her face, immediately turning her appearance under the hood blurry.

Right on the heels of that, she grabbed a handful of shimmering powder from the hidden pouch near her waist and scattered it over herself while reciting an incantation.

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124: Wrapping Up Work

Klein was hidden in the shadows of a building dozens of meters away from the target building. He heard the faint sound of gunshots and the howling of violent winds.

If the enemy runs towards me, should I draw my gun or should I pretend that I didn't see him? He thought as he shivered in cold sweat.

A Beyonder that could, through various means, cut short the lives of others definitely wasn't a Sequence 9 or Sequence 8 Beyonder. They certainly wouldn't be someone that a Seer like him could fight against face to face. Even if he sacrificed himself, he might not be able to slow the target down enough for Dunn and Leonard to catch up with him.

It was fortunate that the Evernight Goddess, the Empress of Misfortune, seemed to hear her 'loyal' guard's prayers. No one ran towards the location where Klein was hiding.

After a few minutes, he heard a melodious song coming from the target building.

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125: Bold Idea

When faced with a strange sense of familiarity, other Sequence 9 Beyonders might try their best to recall or even disregard and forget about it. But a Seer was different. Klein immediately ended the ritual and dispelled the wall of spirituality. He took out a piece of paper and wrote on it a statement: "The source of the sense of familiarity."

After which, he sat on the edge of the bed in the room and silently recited it with the piece of paper in hand.

Seven times later, his pupils became darker. He fell asleep with the help of Cogitation and started conversing with his own spirituality.

In the hazy, contorted world, Klein saw a carriage. He saw a young lady wearing a long gray dress.

This lady had smooth black hair, her face a little round. She had a gentle and pleasant demeanor, but her body was shivering unnaturally.

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126: Divination Isn't All-Powerful

Sis, you worry too much, no—you're just so meticulous! Klein was suddenly energized. He smiled and said, "Melissa, your concern is very reasonable. It's true that I'm actually a little hungry. Yeah, let me change and take a shower."

Although his mouth was already watering, it was even more important to confirm Instigator Trissy's whereabouts!

No one knew what insane measures that bastard would take in order to exact revenge on society!

"Okay." Melissa didn't lift her head but continued her revision.

Tap. Tap. Tap. Klein ran to the second floor and entered his bedroom.

He locked the door, took off his jacket, and underarm holster. Then, he took out a simple silver knife from the drawer.

After sealing his room with a spirituality wall, he took a breath, steadied his emotions, and walked four steps counterclockwise.

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127: Laying the Foundations

The light of the gas lamp glowed through the glass, illuminating the guard room. Old Neil finished flipping through his newspaper, took a sip of coffee, and looked at Klein.

"How do you feel now? Have you calmed down? Or do you need a glass of wine, or an advance on your salary, or a day off?"

Klein, who had completely digested the Seer potion, was attempting to change his "switch" that activated his Spirit Vision with Cogitation. He didn't want it to be too obvious.

The present him no longer needed to rely on a physical motion to activate his Spirit Vision. Therefore, he could use a more concealed approach to achieve his goal; for example, stroking the joints of his middle finger with his thumb in quick succession, or clicking twice with his left molar.

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128: The Impoverished Fool

After eating lunch, Klein only rested for half an hour before he rushed to the Shooting Club to practice with his revolver. He didn't dare to relax, not one bit.

After practicing his shooting skills day after day and expending more than a thousand bullets, he was finally shooting well enough to earn Dunn Smith's basic approval. He was pretty good at fixed-target shooting.

After practicing for a while, he put away his revolver and took the public carriage to a stop close to the house of his combat teacher, Gawain. Then, he walked for ten minutes before arriving at the door.

He changed into his knight training suit that had been left to dry in the sun. After running, skipping rope, lifting weights, squatting, and other exercises, not to mention footwork and punching training, he was covered in sweat and felt exhausted.

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129: Rampager

Lost control? Klein's heart tightened as he nearly blurted out his question.

Even though Dunn and Old Neil had frequently emphasized the possibilities of losing control and the harm it caused, this was the first time he was experiencing an incident like that. He felt a little horrified, a little lost, a little scared, and a little saddened. He felt extremely mixed emotions.

"Among the cases that we… have to deal with annually, a quarter of them were a result of Beyonders who lost control… And among the quarter of cases, a large number of them are our teammates." Dunn's words flashed past Klein's mind, slowing his reaction.

Old Neil, who had experienced many incidents like this, immediately asked, "Where is the Rampager? What do you need us to do?"

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